

**(Dis)Orientation**  
**Identity, Landscape and Embodiment**  
**in the work of Roni Horn**

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A thesis  
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by  
Barbara A. C. Garrie

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# (Dis)Orientation

*Identity, Landscape and Embodiment  
in the work of Roni Horn.*

Barbara Garrie

*Dedicated to the memory of my Dad.*

*John Brunton Garrie*

*1946-2012*

## **Abstract**

**T**his thesis considers the links between identity and landscape in key works by American artist Roni Horn, focusing on a selection of her photo-installations and books. In particular it argues that Horn approaches landscape as a performative category through which to address the performativity of identity, and that in doing so her work privileges the viewer as an embodied participant. Drawing on a feminist approach grounded in phenomenology, the thesis locates androgyny as a key structuring principle in the artist's work. Identifying herself as neither male nor female, Horn employs the notion of in-between-ness to negotiate gender binaries of male/female and to describe the indeterminate and contingent nature of androgynous being. Importantly, the thesis argues that Horn addresses these issues of identity by staging experiences in her work that invite the viewer to perform the very processes by which identity is defined and played out. This strategy is examined through concepts of doubling, the sublime, horizons and dwelling, each of which in their own way involve a sense of orientation and disorientation that gestures toward the in-between-ness of androgyny.

The thesis also considers the tensions between visuality and embodiment in Horn's work. Her use of photographic images within an installation practice is one that establishes a complex set of relations between the opticality of the photograph and the actuality of 'real' space. It is argued that the experiential potential of Horn's photo-installations and books is only realised through the dialectical relation between visuality and embodiment in which both are equally privileged.

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## Introduction

*The point at which something becomes too complex to be itself only. This is the place where a thing becomes a landscape.*

– Roni Horn<sup>1</sup>

In Roni Horn's photo-book *Becoming a Landscape* (2001) [fig. I–IV] a series of doubled photographs picturing Icelandic hot springs are interleaved with a second sequence of paired images featuring the portrait of a young androgynous-looking Icelandic boy. These pairs of photographs are images taken only moments apart, the ostensibly identical images revealing subtle changes captured in the slice of time between each shutter release. These changes hint at the mutability of identity and the constantly changing nature of landscape. The face of the boy and the bubbling water become synonyms for one another: the face as landscape, landscape as body, both as forms of identity.

Identity and landscape are central themes that Horn has pursued throughout her almost thirty-year career, and it is this pair of related concerns that are the principle focus of study in this thesis. Both of these concepts have tended to be default settings in discussions of Horn's work, due in no small part to the fact that the artist herself is particularly active in speaking and writing about her own work. In doing so she has been effective in setting the terms for the reception and interpretation of her work. Horn has reiterated the idea of identity as the keystone of her practice in numerous interviews as well as in her own artist's texts. In a 1995 interview with Claudia Spinelli, she asserted that 'the entrance to all my work is the idea of an encyclopedia

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<sup>1</sup> Roni Horn, *Becoming a Landscape* (Book VIII of *To Place*), (Gottingen: Steidl, 2001).

of identity.’<sup>2</sup> Like identity, landscape too has been a prolific area of interest for Horn. Since traveling to Iceland in 1975 much of her work has found its genesis in the geological terrain of this northern territory. She has described Iceland as: ‘Big enough to get lost on. Small enough to find myself. That’s how to use this island. I come here to place myself in the world. Iceland is a verb and its action is to centre.’<sup>3</sup> For Horn then, the landscape of Iceland has become a site in which she makes and remakes her identity, and in which she embeds herself more deeply in the physical world.

Horn has emerged as a significant figure on the international contemporary art stage with an extensive body of work traversing a range of idioms including sculpture, photography, drawing and artist’s books. Her work has been included in major exhibitions including Documenta IX (1992) and the Venice Biennale (1997), and she has participated in important collaborations with artists such as Donald Judd and Felix Gonzalez-Torres. Over the last five years Horn’s work has also been prolifically exhibited in numerous international solo shows. Significant amongst these was the Tate Modern and Whitney Museum of American Art co-curated retrospective ‘Roni Horn aka Roni Horn’ which opened at London’s Tate Modern in 2009.<sup>4</sup> Providing a broad survey of Horn’s practice from the 1970s to 2009, this exhibition focused on exploring ideas of identity, mutability and place and acknowledged the hugely important relationships between viewer, object and space that underpin the artist’s work. This same set of concerns provides the starting point for my own project.

In this thesis I consider the links between identity and landscape in key works by Horn, focusing on a selection of her photo-installations and books. In particular I argue that Horn approaches landscape as a performative category through which to address the performativity of identity, and that in doing so her work privileges the viewer as an embodied participant. My approach to thinking about the way that landscape operates in Horn’s practice is based on the phenomenological view that

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<sup>2</sup> Roni Horn, interview with Claudia Spinelli, *Journal of Contemporary Art*, June 1995, <http://www.jca-online.com/horn.html>, unpaginated. Accessed 27 May 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Roni Horn (1991) ‘Iceland’ in Beth Huseman (ed.), *Roni Horn aka Roni Horn: Subject Index* (London: Tate Publishing, 2009), 75.

<sup>4</sup> Curated by Mark Godfrey and Donna de Salvo, ‘Roni Horn aka Roni Horn’ ran from 25 February–25 May 2009 at Tate Modern, London. The exhibition toured to Collection Lambert, Avignon, 21 June–4 October 2009; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 6 November 2009–24 January 2010; The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, 19 February–9 May 2010.

landscape is a site constructed through our embodied interactions with it. This is a position that has been asserted in the philosophical writings of key phenomenological thinkers such as Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, but it was not until relatively recently that this way of understanding landscape returned as a popular mode of thought. The work of writers such as Edward S. Casey, John Wiley and Timothy Ingold has contributed to the reinvigoration of landscape as a field of phenomenological study. An important starting point for my own project is the assertion of feminist geographer Catherine Nash who states that, ‘a recognition of the constructed nature of identity allows landscape to be used as a shifting strategic sources of identification without implying the adoption of a masculinist position, or a fixed, natural or inherent identity, or a restrictive notion of space.’<sup>5</sup>

Drawing on a feminist approach grounded in phenomenology, I locate androgyny as a key structuring principle in the artist’s work. Identifying herself as neither male nor female, Horn employs the notion of in-between-ness to negotiate gender binaries of male/female and to describe the indeterminate and contingent nature of androgynous being. Importantly, I argue that Horn addresses these issues of identity by staging experiences in her work that invite the viewer to perform the very processes by which identity is defined and played out. I examine this strategy through concepts of doubling, the sublime, horizons and dwelling, each of which in their own way involve a sense of orientation and disorientation that gestures toward the in-between-ness of androgyny.

A second but no less important thread that is woven through this thesis concerns the tensions between visibility and embodiment that are played out in Horn’s work. By placing Horn’s work within the theoretical framework of phenomenology, this thesis more seriously considers the implications of the complex subject-object relationships at the core of her practice. Actively setting up encounters between viewers and the objects and images she produces, Horn’s works rely on the ‘participation’ of her audience. Installations and books are purposefully designed to engage the viewer at a very physical level. Whether it be moving between gallery spaces to compare

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<sup>5</sup> Catherine Nash, ‘Remapping the Body/Land: New Cartographies of Identity, Gender, and Landscape in Ireland’ in Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose (eds), *Writing Women and Space: Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies* (New York: Guilford Press, 1994), 239.

sculptural objects, following a sequence of images around the circumference of a room, or flicking backward and forward through the pages of one of her artist books, the body of the viewer and their connection to, or interaction with, the objects and spaces that surround them are of paramount importance. From a phenomenological perspective, Horn's works, through their sensitivity to the viewer as an embodied subject, encourage a reciprocal exchange between viewer and artwork – subject and object – that grounds both within the world of lived experience. Her use of photographic images within an installation practice is one that establishes a complex set of relations between the opticality of the photograph and the actuality of 'real' space. I argue that the experiential potential of Horn's photo-installations and books is only realised through the dialectical relation between visuality and embodiment in which both are equally privileged.

While there is certainly nothing new in claiming identity, landscape or embodiment as key motifs in Horn's practice, it is true that these concerns have largely only been treated by writers of her work in a relatively superficial manner. There are, I think, two primary reasons for this: firstly, these expositions have largely taken the form of catalogue essays produced to accompany Horn's exhibitions; and secondly, the artist herself is particularly active in discussing her own practice. What this means is that texts are often produced to cater to an informed but general audience, and that length and tone are dictated by the catalogue format. There are, however, several writers of notable exception who have made significant contributions to the critical literature surrounding Horn's work, whose scholarship I shall refer to in the unfolding of this thesis: Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, Jan Avgikos, Briony Fer, Mark Godfrey and Thierry de Duve are key amongst these.

### **The Role of the Interpreter**

In her exposition of the phenomenological method, Amelia Jones points out that 'the identity we ascribe to a particular image or object (an identity connected, inevitably, with a posited making subject) is intimately connected to our own psychic desires,

fantasies, and projections.’<sup>6</sup> As Jones suggests, interpretation is never a neutral activity. This observation is critical in coming to terms with how Horn’s work operates, as I shall discuss throughout the four chapters of this thesis, but it is also significant in positioning my own reading of Horn’s work; my own particular agenda and projections. In recognition of the importance of identifying myself as the author of this dissertation and its particular interpretation, the following paragraphs set out my own subjective interest in, and relation to, Horn’s practice. My thesis does not set out to present a radical rethinking of Horn’s work but instead aims to elaborate a certain set of concerns from my own particular point of view. The passages laid out below thus help establish the coordinates from which I develop this perspective.

I was born in Scotland and brought up for the first seventeen years of my life between the East coast region of Fife and a small town called Callander located in the centre of the country [fig. V]. Having moved to New Zealand in 1994, I now find that at the moment of writing this thesis I have now spent as much of my life in New Zealand as in Scotland. Yet, it is difficult to say that I feel the same sense of belonging as my native Kiwis, and in the next seventeen years I suspect this sentiment may remain. The reason for this is in many ways quite simple: I have a Scottish accent. Certainly this has softened some, and I now notice a Kiwi ‘twang’ in my pronunciation of some sounds, but ultimately it is not the accent of a native New Zealander. As such I am reminded on an almost daily basis that I am not from *here*. When taking a class, speaking to a shopkeeper or introduced to new friends, it is not long until conversation turns to my ‘otherness’ with the question ‘where are you from?’. On the rare occasions since 1994 that I have been able to return to Scotland – the place I am *from* – the experience has been a similar one of displacement and difference. Again, my accent betrays my having been somewhere else and, having now spent most of my adult years in another country, I feel a kind of unfamiliarity with Scotland and ‘Scottishness’. The effect is a sense of being neither Scottish nor New Zealander but, at the same time, and paradoxically, being both.

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<sup>6</sup> Amelia Jones, ‘Meaning, Identity and Embodiment: The Uses of Merleau-Ponty’s Phenomenology in Art History’ in Dana Arnold and Margret Iverson (eds), *Art and Thought* (Malden, Mass. and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 78.

Another recent experience of place is also worth recalling here in contextualizing my relationship to this project. In September 2010 and February 2011, my current home city of Christchurch was shaken by two major earthquakes measuring 7.1 and 6.3 respectively on the richter scale. The physical effects of these events on the city were devastating, as was the psychological impact on many people. In the central city where I live there was significant damage to buildings, many completely collapsing or suffering severe structural damage. After both earthquakes a city-wide cordon was put in place and only slowly pulled back as areas were made safe. Even now, almost a year after the February quake, the inner sanctum of the CBD remains off limits to all but a few demolition teams and council workers. What was a familiar city-scape is now radically altered, and continues to alter daily. It has, in many ways, become strange to me.

In his essay ‘On the Aesthetics of the Everyday: Familiarity, Strangeness and the Meaning of Place’, Arto Haapala argues that it is through this very play of strangeness and familiarity that we make sense of the world.<sup>7</sup> While strangeness is always our starting point it cannot be a continuous state.<sup>8</sup> In making ourselves at home in a particular place we establish connections – to buildings, spaces, people etc – that allow us to develop a sense of the familiar. We see or experience these markers in our everyday ‘being-in-the-world’ of that place, and through this repeated action we locate ourselves in relation to them. According to Haapala, it is when familiarity is ruptured by an encounter with the new that we really start to look.

On a very personal level, these are the experiences that have led me to this particular project. Horn too speaks of her identity as being formed by a sense of ‘in-between-ness’, of being neither ‘this nor that’. In looking at and experiencing her work I am drawn to this notion of the in-between which I recognize in myself. This acknowledgment of my own voice, of my own participation in the act of interpretation, is a significant one in terms of the phenomenological method whereby my own identity is constructed and reflected back on me in the very process of my critical reading. This is a point that Jones again emphasises when she says that ‘our

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<sup>7</sup> Arto Haapala, ‘On the Aesthetics of the Everyday: Familiarity, Strangeness and the Meaning of Place’ in Andrew Light and Jonathan M. Smith (eds), *The Aesthetics of Everyday Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 43.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 44.

perception of the work and the identity it suggests to us, in turn, informs our own sense of who we are.’<sup>9</sup>

What this thesis presents then is *my* interpretation of key themes in Horn’s practice, fully cognisant of the influence that my own experiences and interests bring to bear on that reading. In producing this study I did not set out to discover a definitive meaning for Horn’s work, and certainly to do so would be a failed endeavour given the nature of her practice. Rather than attempting to present an exhaustive study of her practice, this dissertation represents *my* journey through it in relation to the experience of in-between-ness that I share with Horn. There is already an extensive archive of interviews that document the artists thoughts on her practice, as well as many of her own writings. Thus, while I haven’t felt it necessary to make direct contact with Horn, her voice is still an important part of this thesis. While I see her as a necessary and important part of the work and I make use of what she has to say, she is not the centre of the work to a distant viewer on the periphery. Rather there is a dialectical relation between the two.

I also have to acknowledge myself as the viewer that I identify within the thesis. An initial caveat to make in regard to my use of the term ‘viewer’ concerns the embodied experiences of Horn’s work that are the subject of my analysis. Horn’s viewer is always a participant not just a spectator who apprehends the work visually at a physical remove. In this sense the term ‘viewer’ might seem misleading in emphasising a disembodied visual encounter with Horn’s work. However, I have chosen to use the term viewer for ease of writing and rely on my descriptions of the experiential nature of the works I discuss to make clear how I see the engagement between viewer and artwork playing out. It is also important to note that there is no one singular ‘viewer’ of any work but a multiplicity of viewers who each bring their own experiences of the world to bear on their interpretation. I have used the term ‘viewer’ in the third person, again for ease of writing, but freely admit that the responses to Horn’s works that I describe are my own, even while they may also be shared by others. In this regard it is also important to quite explicitly state that my interpretation of Horn’s work is that of a young female heterosexual academic-to-be

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<sup>9</sup> Jones, 79.



who has spent a considerable amount of time with her installations, sculptures and books; looking at them, walking around them and thinking about them. In 2009 I visited Horn's retrospective exhibition 'Roni Horn aka Roni Horn' at Tate Modern, London, returning on several occasions to spend more time with the work. This was a critical aspect of my research. Concerned with unpacking the way in which Horn's works enact particular experiences and how these experiences become meaningful, it was necessary that I could speak from my own first-hand encounters. In this respect, the Tate Modern retrospective was timely for my own project. While visiting the Tate exhibition in London I also took the opportunity to view a number of Horn's artist's books that are housed at the British Library and have followed this up by accessing further publications through the University of Canterbury and University of Auckland libraries. In the same way that it was important for me to experience Horn's sculptures and installations myself, I also felt that it was necessary to have the tactile experience of reading and looking through the books that I discuss in this thesis.

### **Some Notes on My Approach**

The individual works that comprise Horn's practice are intimately connected and rich in their potential meanings. Although Horn has suggested that her works ought to have discrete lives of their own so that they might be experienced by *any* viewer without knowledge of a prior history or ongoing narrative, it is also true that a sense of relation exists between the myriad objects and images which comprise her practice. When Horn states that, 'I have this idea that each work should be unto itself' what she signals is not that individual works should be isolated from their connection to any other, but that each work should elicit a *direct* engagement with the viewer, unhindered by reliance on a pre-existing discourse.<sup>10</sup> Overall, the sense of Horn's oeuvre is more like that of a networked series of objects and images. Those themes of which I have already spoken – identity, place, mutability – are threads which weave their way through her practice. So too, objects and images often resurface in new configurations, forming new relations with other works. This re-use and re-contextualisation of material within what are ostensibly new books, installations or exhibitions, builds a sense of Horn's oeuvre as a tightly woven matrix of concerns.

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<sup>10</sup> Roni Horn, *Roni Horn aka Roni Horn*, Vol. 2 [Subject Index]. (London: Tate Modern, 2009) 75.

Lynne Cooke points to a photograph in Horn's 1994 installation *Pi* as a metaphor for the way in which this particular installation functions. It introduces, she argues, 'a larger infrastructure into the piece, a skein of things overlaid, interwoven and entwined together.'<sup>11</sup> The photograph is a closely cropped image of a piece of old wallpaper covered in an intensive net-like mesh of intersecting lines [fig. VI]. Extending Cooke's observation, I suggest that this picture in fact represents the rhizomatic nature of Horn's wider practice where, as the artist herself puts it, 'the conceptual origins of one work often bleed into another form [...] enriching the experience of the other.'<sup>12</sup> With this in mind, this thesis does not attempt to close off discussion of specific works within discrete chapters. Each chapter takes two or three exemplary works as its primary focus, however these works often resurface throughout the thesis where they are absorbed into new discourses and new sets of relations.

## Outline of Chapters

Each chapter in this thesis opens with a short description of one of Horn's works based on my own experience of viewing and experiencing it. This is intended to emphasize the importance of Horn's artworks as the particular phenomena that underpin and guide this thesis but it is also my hope that these descriptions will extend to the reader some sense of the actual experience of the objects and images under consideration which cannot be fully appreciated solely through the reproductions presented in the illustration sections. Ultimately my approach in this thesis is to examine how it is that Horn's works come to mean within specific contexts; in this case, in relation to identity, landscape and embodiment. To put it more clearly, I am interested in discerning *how* Horn's works mean rather than *what* they mean. Description, then, provides a useful mode of entry by allowing me to undertake a close reading of specific works through which their complexities might begin to be unraveled.

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<sup>11</sup> Lynne Cooke in conversation with Roni Horn in Louise Nerli, Lynne Cooke and Thierry de Duve (eds), *Roni Horn* (Phaidon: London, 2003), 15–16.

<sup>12</sup> Roni Horn in conversation with Jan Howard, 'Inner Geography' in *Roni Horn: Inner Geography* (Baltimore: Baltimore Museum of Art, 1994), unpaginated.

The opening chapter of this thesis introduces the concept of androgyny as a form of in-between-ness by which Horn explores questions of gender and identity. Horn's self-proclaimed sense of androgyny is positioned as a critical concept in establishing the artist's interest in the body and in strategies of doubling and repetition. I frame this discussion within the context of Simone de Beauvoir's and Judith Butler's feminist readings of gender as identities in process. Although I do not position Horn herself as a feminist or 'woman' artist (whatever this may mean), I argue that an understanding of the concerns of these key feminist writers provides an important means of conceptualizing the work. I introduce Horn's interest in embodied experience by contextualizing it within this feminist discourse and considering how her work relates to the practice of American Minimalism with which her work has often been compared. Working in particular with Butler's notion of repetition, I then go on to examine a group of works that I argue orchestrate performances of the in-between liminal state of androgyny.

In chapter two I turn the focus of the thesis toward the idea of landscape. Having established the importance of embodiment in Horn's work, I move on to look at how the body is deployed in creating experiences of landscape within the gallery environment. Continuing to develop the notion of androgyny as a site of difference, I look in particular at the installations *Still Water (Another Thames, for Example)* (1999) and *Pooling-You* (1996–1997) as works that invoke an experience of the sublime through an allusion to water and excess. I argue that as an identity that incorporates within itself the potential for difference, androgyny can be understood as a kind of gender excess that echoes the overwhelming and unbounded experience of the sublime. After outlining how these photographic series can be seen to generate experiences of the sublime that resonate with a Romantic sensibility, I then argue that the embodied and participatory nature of these installations undermines and radically challenges a masculine reading of the sublime operations at stake in the works. Barbara Claire-Freeman's notion of the feminine sublime is employed to demonstrate how the *Still Water* and *Pooling-You* installations open up a space in which to imaginatively conceive of otherness.

Having come to terms with the way that Horn's work opens the viewer to the experience of difference and the potential for multiple forms of identity, chapter three

explores the artist's use of horizon-like structures that confront viewers with the processes by which their own perceptions are formed. Appropriating one of the quintessential motifs of the pictorial landscape genre, I argue in this chapter that the horizon form of both *You are the Weather* (1994–1995) and *Pi* (1998) create immersive environments in which there is a conflation of viewer and view which subverts the oppositional binary of subject/object. In developing this argument, I refer to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological writings on the horizon in which he positions the lived body as one that is always indeterminate and subject to change.

My final chapter takes a slightly different angle but continues to draw on ideas of performance and perception that I develop through the course of the previous three chapters of the thesis. Focusing on *Herðubreið at Home* (2007) and *Weather Reports You* (2007), two of Horn's book projects that have received much less critical attention than her installations and sculptural works, I examine the way that identity is formed through the process of dwelling within place. Taking the work of anthropologist Tim Ingold as my point of departure, I argue that Horn's two publications demonstrate a layering of multiple perspectives in which place and identity are made. These projects adopt a pseudo-anthropological approach in which Horn documents the everyday lives of Icelanders and the processes by which they affirm their belonging. I argue, however, that more than this, these books through their making and subsequent reading, also function as acts of 'placing' for both Horn and readers of the texts.

While Horn's work has consistently focused on a small number of key themes, it is anything but static. Her work is marked by significant shifts between different media and the formal variations visible in her bodies of work are, at least to the uninitiated eye, striking. Horn's oeuvre exudes a kind of poetic allure that draws you in but which simultaneously challenges and disorients. Getting to know her work is not to come to terms with a singular style but to face multiple approaches and multiple identities.

## Chapter One

# Somewhere In-Between

### The Performance of Androgyny

*The closest I can come is to speak about growing up androgynous. It started with my name, which is not male or female. It seems to me, retrospectively, that my entire identity formed around this, around not being this or that: a man or a woman. I don't fit in with these kinds of singular identities.*

– Roni Horn<sup>1</sup>

Though they initially present themselves as perfectly spherical objects, Horn's *Asphere* (1986–2001) [fig. 1.1] sculptures are in fact less uniform in shape than we might first perceive. As the title of this group of works hints, the objects are actually slightly, but almost imperceptibly, aspherical; each solid machined ball of metal a subtle elliptical aberration of spherical precision. The *Asphere* induces a sense of doubt, the de-familiarisation of the object precipitating a double-take. The latent sense that what we have seen is somehow not as we think it should be, that it is in some way different, is one that prompts a second look from the viewer. And as the viewer revisits the work, it slowly reveals itself as something other than expected; not a sphere at all but a uniquely aspherical object. It is this sense of de-familiarisation or disorientation that has become a critical strategy in Horn's practice. Of this work she has commented: '*Asphere* [...] is an homage to androgyny. It gives the experience of something initially familiar but the more time spent with it, the less familiar it becomes. I think of it as a self-portrait.'<sup>2</sup> While it may seem counter-intuitive to interpret such self-contained and austere works as markers of identity, closer

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<sup>1</sup> Roni Horn, interview with Claudia Spinelli, *Journal of Contemporary Art*, June 1995, <http://www.jca-online.com/horn.html>, unpaginated. Accessed 27 May 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Roni Horn, interview with Collier Schorr, 'Weather Girls', *Frieze*, No. 32, January–February 1997, 43.

consideration reveals a sub-text of relations that speak to Horn's self-proclaimed sense of androgyny, a state she has defined as 'the integration of difference as a source of identity'.<sup>3</sup>

Identity is a thematic thread that runs throughout Horn's extensive body of work, and it is one that is continually problematised. The commentary on her own sense of self, that is a sense of being neither one thing or another – neither male or female – might best be understood as the bedrock on which the rest of her practice is built. In this chapter I undertake a close reading of this notion of the indeterminate androgynous self, focusing in particular on how this identification has led Horn to pursue an almost obsessive concern with orchestrating embodied experiences, played out in the complex relations she sets up between viewer and art object.

I begin by considering some of the gender issues that are at stake in Horn's formulation of her identity as being androgynous. Although never having definitively aligned herself with feminist art practices, I argue that Horn's work is nonetheless indebted to feminist ideologies which have challenged ingrained notions of gender and what it is to be a woman. Indeed, having graduated with her MFA in Sculpture from Yale in 1978, her formative years as a student and young emerging artist coincided with the activity of the modern feminist movement and the rise of identity politics as an earnest field of enquiry. Of her relationship to feminist ideals and 'woman's art' Horn has stated:

Well, I think [gender] is of interest [in my work], but maybe not in a literal sense. Sexuality and gender are now topical themes. I try to avoid this. It is a reluctance to be named and a wish to stay away from that way of being known. But there is no question that issues of my sexuality and gender are important to the decisions I have made in my work and in the way I conduct myself in the world. I would never deny it, but at the same time I am not interested in being named as a woman, particularly not as a woman artist. The issue of whether or not I am a woman artist is the problem of the questioner — it's not my problem.<sup>4</sup>

While this comment clearly asserts Horn's own aversion to reading her work in terms of strictly feminist approaches, she does not close down the possibility of viewers

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<sup>3</sup> Horn, *Journal of Contemporary Art*, unpaginated.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

interpreting her work within such frameworks. What she seemingly does here is to throw the question of gender and its implications for her practice out to the audience. However, her response to a Dia Art Foundation lecture presented by Jan Avgikos in 2002 suggests a more deep-seated mistrust of feminist discourse and a more intense need to control the way in which her work is understood. In her lecture, Avgikos undertook an exploratory feminist enquiry in which she consistently reinforced Horn's work as a process of individuation or search for sense of self. Avgikos referred to Horn's journey through Iceland as a kind of 'vision quest' in which 'she endured' isolation and 'she took' risks.<sup>5</sup> Other passages refer to Horn's writings as 'journal entries' and describe a body of work rich in 'personal iconography' where 'her experiences are written all over [it] [...]'.<sup>6</sup> For Horn, Avgikos's reading of her work was one that fundamentally undermined her own intentions and effectively closed down the radical potential of the work by focusing too heavily on the artist herself. As such she refused to allow images to be reproduced alongside the text in the collected volume of published essays that followed these lectures. Lynne Cooke notes in the introduction to this volume that:

[Horn's] request that no illustrations of her work be included in this volume amounts as much to a critique of what she deems Dia's refusal to support the artist's position as to a reflection of her antipathy toward a reading that discounts her steadfast attempt to reframe gender issues in what are for her less programmatic and deterministic.<sup>7</sup>

While it is not my intention here to present a narrative that simply confirms Horn's understanding of her practice, and while I think there is much of value in Avgikos's text, I do see the artist's concerns as entirely valid. One of the successes of Horn's work, as I will argue in this chapter, is the way that it seeks to activate the spaces *between* ostensibly autonomous or opposing identities. The task of searching for Horn in the work is in many ways one that misses the point. Horn's own experiences certainly provide a point of entry to the work, but what makes her practice so continually fascinating, I argue, is that these are still very much only the beginning. In this chapter, then, I do not so much seek to locate Horn's work within an exclusively

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<sup>5</sup> Jan Avgikos, 'Events and Relations, and Then Some: Roni Horn' in Lynne Cooke and Karen Kelly (eds), *Robert Lehman Lectures on Contemporary Art* (New York: Dia Art Foundation, 2009), 102, 105.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 103, 105.

<sup>7</sup> Lynne Cooke, 'Introduction' in Lynne Cooke and Karen Kelly (eds), *Robert Lehman Lectures on Contemporary Art* (New York: Dia Art Foundation, 2009), 12.



feminist paradigm, rather I seek to explore issues of identity politics and embodiment that have been raised through feminist discourses in order to map out a critical space in which to understand the aesthetic and conceptual mechanisms at work in her practice. In doing so, my intention is not to impose or discover an identity for Horn, or to make a case for her work as that of a woman. Instead, I am interested in suggesting a framework in which her practice can be seen to pose significant questions about what it means to identify or be identified (regardless of what that identification may refer to). I take Horn's claims to androgyny as a starting point but move out from here to consider how such an identification might function as a structuring principle of the work and how this structure then opens the work to new ways of conceptualizing and engaging with both gender and identity construction.

### **Feminism and Gender Performance**

Feminist theory has done much in the last forty years to foreground gender as a culturally constructed site that is not bound to biologically-determined accounts of sexuality. Dating from the 1940s and 1950s, the writing of Simone de Beauvoir has been critical in asserting this position, and has exerted considerable influence over subsequent generations of feminist thinkers.<sup>8</sup> In particular, her work has contributed to discourses concerning female subjectivity and oppression, and the rhetoric of power. Beauvoir's writing was influenced by the phenomenological tradition, largely through the existential work of Martin Heidegger and Jean Paul Sartre. From the late 1980s, Judith Butler extended on Beauvoir's thinking, similarly adopting a phenomenological position. Her work was pivotal in asserting gender as a performance of acts imposed on the body. In marking out a space in which to consider Horn's practice I focus on Beauvoir and Butler because their work, like Horn's, is very much about 'doing' rather than 'being'; Beauvoir forwards the idea of 'becoming a woman' as a 'process' while Butler speaks of the 'performance of gender'. In this sense, 'woman' (or gender more broadly) is understood as a verb rather than a noun. Horn invokes this same linguistic turn in the titles of works such as *Becoming a*

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<sup>8</sup> While de Beauvoir's work has become significant in modern feminist scholarship, Ruth Evans has pointed out that *The Second Sex* (1949) was not widely acknowledged during its own period and that, despite it signaling the direction of later feminist arguments, was far from being a pivotal text for modern feminism. See Ruth Evans (ed), *Simone de Beauvoir's The Second Sex: New Interdisciplinary Essays* (Manchester, New York: Manchester University Press, 1998).

*Landscape* and *To Place* thereby assigning an active voice to the work. As I suggested in the introduction to this thesis, Horn's interest in landscape as a performative category is one that I argue also mirrors the performative nature of identity.

In her oft-cited text *The Second Sex*, which was first published in 1949 and in many ways pre-empted the feminist rhetoric that dominated the 1960s–1970s, Beauvoir famously asserts that 'one is not born a woman, but, rather, becomes a woman.'<sup>9</sup> Here Beauvoir makes an incisive distinction between 'woman' as a biological and a cultural designation. Although she insists that the identity of 'woman' is intricately tied to her embodiment – that is to her biology – Beauvoir also acknowledges it as an historically inscribed category bound by social codes and conventions. 'Book II' of *The Second Sex* tracks the development of the female body from childhood, through adolescence to maturity, focusing on bodily functions such as menstruation, sex and pregnancy. Beauvoir begins by explaining woman's subordinate position in society as a result of this biology. She describes the way in which the female body is discursively constructed within patriarchal society as one that teaches and reinforces the idea of that body as shameful and incapable of expressing a subjective personality. However, Beauvoir does not see biology as destiny. She argues that because the female body has been culturally constructed it must also be responsive to the possibility of being re-constructed. In this formulation, the very idea of 'woman', rather than being a fixed and natural identity, is constantly open to revision predicated on the cultural influences of a particular historical moment.

Beauvoir's view of sexual difference is thus fundamentally anti-essentialist and she remains skeptical of attempts to define specific gender categories such as 'woman', even though she posits this very question in her introductory notes:

If her functioning as a female is not enough to define woman, if we decline also to explain her through 'the eternal feminine', and if nevertheless we admit, provisionally, that women do exist, then we must face the question: what is a woman?<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. E. M. Parshley (New York: Vintage, 1983), 295. *Le Deuxième Sexe* was first published in French in 1949. The first English translation was published in 1953.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

Declining to provide a conclusive answer to the 'woman question', Beauvoir again signals her philosophical roots in existential thought. She did not believe in a shared female embodiment describing, on the contrary, the manifold nature of the female. In this regard she states:

Thus, as against the dispersed, contingent, and multiple existences of actual women, mythical thought opposes the Eternal Feminine, unique and changeless. If the definition provided for this concept is contradicted by the behavior of flesh and blood women, it is the latter who are wrong: we are told not that Femininity is a false entity, but that the women concerned are not feminine. [...] In actuality, of course, women appear under various aspects; but each of the myths built up around the subject of woman is intended to sum her up *in toto*.<sup>11</sup>

While this statement certainly evidences Beauvoir's objection to the notion that a single monolithic identity can be ascribed to all women, it is nonetheless one which remains fundamentally bound to a male/female binary. Inasmuch as Beauvoir claims the potential multiplicity of the female gender, her position is one that remains committed to the binary oppositions that have structured Western thought; male/female, transcendence/immanence, self/other. Ultimately, then, her understanding of women is one governed by its relationality. Alex Hughs and Anne Witz note that Beauvoir's existentialist phenomenology allowed for the existence of female subjectivity in spite of her body (specifically her ability to reproduce) rather than through it.<sup>12</sup> Women were, in Beauvoir's conception, tied to a state of immanence – an inward looking passivity governed by the natural reproductive functions of the body – while men demonstrated a transcendent body – rational and under their control. Woman is characterised as 'other' in relation to the male 'subject' since she is 'defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her.'<sup>13</sup> In order to be freed from this oppressive relation to man, Beauvoir challenges woman to absorb or integrate characteristics of man, thus allowing them to reach that privileged male position.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 282–3.

<sup>12</sup> Alex Hughs and Anne Witz, 'Feminism and the Matter of Bodies' *Body & Society*, Vol. 3, No. 1, March 2007, 57.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

Criticism has been leveled at Beauvoir for precisely this refusal to think outside of the male/female dichotomy. Mary Bloodsworth-Lugo points out that in Beauvoir's work, 'women were rendered "equal" only insofar as they were depicted as "the same".'<sup>14</sup> Despite Beauvoir's objections to the summing up of woman '*in toto*', Butler too claims that this is the inevitable outcome of any system which maintains the polarities of male/female oppositions and heterosexual bias. She argues that 'the act of differentiating the two oppositional moments of the binary results in a consolidation of each term, the respective internal coherence of sex, gender and desire.'<sup>15</sup>

Taking up Beauvoir's work in the 1980s, Butler has adopted an approach based in feminist phenomenology, positioning the body as critical in thinking through the way that gender functions. In her essay 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution', published in 1988, she argues that the construction of gender roles is enforced through the 'stylised repetition of acts' and that the body is central in the rehearsal of these operations.<sup>16</sup> These acts are, according to Butler, played out as 'bodily gestures, movements and enactments of various kinds [which] constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self.'<sup>17</sup> By adopting and sustaining appropriate sets of behaviors, individuals inscribe their bodies with gendered identities that are deemed socially acceptable, thereby instituting those behaviors or acts as natural rather than culturally constituted. In this formulation, Butler focuses on Beauvoir's assertion that one '*becomes* a woman'. To 'become' suggests a *process* by which the body is acculturated as 'woman'. As such, Butler refers to gender as a set of constructed fictions upheld by the 'author's' belief in the truth of that fiction and the repeated performance of those beliefs through the material body.<sup>18</sup> It is important to add here that Butler's notion of 'repeated acts' applies equally to the viewing subject. Gender-specific identities are not simply those that we inscribe on our own bodies (no matter how socially coded they are), they are also reinforced through the 'act' of looking and interpretation. As viewers, whether of artworks or other individuals, we are also

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<sup>14</sup> Mary K. Bloodsworth-Lugo, *In-between Bodies: Sexual Difference, Race and Sexuality* (Albany: New York: State University of New York Press, 2007), 12.

<sup>15</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 30–1.

<sup>16</sup> See for example, Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*; Judith Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory', *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 40, No. 4, December 1988, 519–531.

<sup>17</sup> Butler, 'Performative Acts', 519.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 522.

implicated in the process of determining and maintaining the conventions by which gender is constructed.

Butler's contributions, however, are better known through two more recent texts that have become critical reading in the field of gender studies: *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) and *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "sex"* (1993). Extending on the arguments regarding identity laid out in *Subjects of Desire*, her second book *Gender Trouble* continues to problematise the idea of sex, gender and sexuality as unambiguous categories, suggesting instead that they must be understood as contingent designations if they are to account for real, lived experiences of gender and sexuality. Of particular importance in this text was Butler's criticism of feminism's heterosexual focus, which, she argues, had conflated gender and sexuality in a way that could not take account of lesbian experience. While feminism had debated the role of woman within contemporary society, arguing against her position as other to the dominant male, it had in turn maintained another form of 'othering' by neglecting identities outside of the heterosexual norm. Butler thus highlights the difficulty of rendering any kind of collective identity, whether it be 'male', 'female' or 'lesbian', and as a result acknowledges the inherent instability of *all* identity. This is not to say, however, that all identity is the unique and innate property of the individual. Butler figures identity as culturally coded and determined by signifying practices that are based in heterosexual systems of power.

In *Gender Trouble*, Butler presents parody as a strategy that complicates and has the potential to destabilise heterosexual assumptions about gender. She focuses in particular on drag as a disruptive practice in which 'the notion of an original or primary gender identity is often parodied.'<sup>19</sup> The gender performance that drag represents, and that Butler distinguishes from anatomical sex and gender identity, is one that, in her view, has the power to expose the very idea of an essential female identity by way of its very layering and exaggeration of identity. Drag disturbs the stable bounds of the heterosexual body and demonstrates that all gender types are in fact performed identities. In doing so, the parodic stance of drag lays gender open to possible renovation.

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<sup>19</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 174.

Feminist art history has extensively addressed the ways in which the critique of power and gender construction advanced by writers such as Beauvoir, and later Butler, has influenced female artists since the 1960s. Key names in this narrative include Carolee Schneemann, Judy Chicago, Lynda Benglis, Cindy Sherman, Sherrie Levine and Barbara Kruger. Horn, however, is not generally considered within this canon. Although working concurrently with Sherman, Levine and Kruger through the early part of her career, her practice stands apart as less overtly engaged with feminist concerns, while still exploring issues of gender and identity. As I have already noted, Horn has never tried to align her work with feminist ideals, so in this sense it is unsurprising that she does not feature in mainstream accounts of feminist art. However, I would suggest that another reason for this lies in the characteristically Minimalist look of her sculpture during the late 1970s and 1980s. While artists such as Schneemann and Chicago reveled in the flesh and fluids of the female body in the 1970s, Sherman and Kruger later challenged the power of the male gaze in its constitution of the female. Horn, meanwhile was producing highly-finished abstract sculptures that resonated with the pure forms espoused by Minimalists such as Donald Judd, Robert Morris, Richard Serra and Carl Andre; imperatives that were understood as fundamentally masculine.

In the following paragraphs I briefly consider some of the works being produced under the rubric of 'feminist art' from the 1960s, before moving on to discuss in more detail how the Minimalist aesthetic evident in Horn's work can be placed in relation to this discourse. In doing so, my aim is to contextualise her practice within the broader textures of art practice in the 1970s and 1980s and to mark out a space from which to develop a more nuanced reading of her work based on the concept of androgyny. Having placed Horn's work, I will then return to Butler's theory of performativity, arguing that this provides a significant tool for unpacking the gender issues at stake in not only her early sculptural works but also the photographic suites she has been producing since the 1990s.

Artists involved in the feminist movement took up issues of gender construction in their practices, producing works which have actively sought to renegotiate and reclaim the territory of 'woman'. Feminist work of the 1960s and 70s was largely characterised by an aesthetic grounded in the biology and corporeality of the female

body. Schneeman's *Interior Scroll* (1975) [fig. 1.2], a performance in which the artist stood naked on a table and pulled a paper scroll from her vagina while reading from it, positioned the female body as a source of knowledge and power, while Chicago's *Menstruation Bathroom* (1972) [fig. 1.3], an installation produced for the AIR Gallery's 1972 exhibition 'Womanhouse', reframed the private and intimate cycles of the female body as empowering rather than shameful, hidden functions. A shift in thinking through the 1980s, however, claimed that such approaches did not account for the systems by which the idea of the female body was constructed. Work that focused on female embodied experience was thus increasingly seen as essentialist and complicit in emphasizing gender polarities.<sup>20</sup>

The photographic practices of Sherman and Kruger exemplify a new approach to feminist discourses of art prominent from the late 1970s. Their work explored and challenged the power of the male gaze in its constitution of the female. Photographing herself in a variety of guises and locations that invoke the classic mannerisms of American and foreign films from the 1950s and 1960s, Sherman performed a series of stereotypical female identities in her famous *Untitled Film Stills* (1977–1980) [fig. 1.4–1.5] series. The images variously picture 'woman' as housewife, socialite, sex object and damsel in distress and in doing so underscore the fictive, rather than essential, nature of these classifications. In literally acting out these multiple identities Sherman demonstrated, and began to challenge, the kinds of 'stylised acts' of which Butler speaks. In order to 'be' a housewife, Sherman locates herself at the kitchen sink. She wears an apron and is accompanied by the appropriate domestic props; washing up liquid, a dish rack and cooking pot. Kruger's *Untitled (Your gaze hits the side of my face)* (1981) [fig. 1.6], in a similar way, made use of the look of mass media advertising to subvert the messages about women that it reinforced. The image pictures the profile of a classically-inspired bust, overlaid down the left hand margin by text that appears to be formed from words cut from magazines. The gesture implied is one of violence. A paragon of classical beauty, the bust itself, dislocated from its limbs, suggests a subject without its own agency; its identity is one constructed by the male gaze that, as the text indicates, bears down on it. This

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<sup>20</sup> For a fuller discussion of feminist art and criticism see, for example: Helena Reckitt and Peggy Phelan (eds), *Art and Feminism* (London and New York: Phaidon, 2001).



aggressive gesture is one that dramatises the silencing of women within male dominated discourses.

Like Schneeman and Chicago, Horn's work is fundamentally grounded in bodily experience, and like Sherman and Kruger she produces work that foregrounds and challenges the cultural coding of identity. Where her work critically differs is in her means of achieving these ends. The bodily experiences Horn cultivates are not celebrations of female corporeality, and nor do her works engage in parodic critique. Rather, as I will go on to argue, Horn sets up specific relations between ostensibly minimalist objects which are then activated by the bodily interaction of the viewer. In doing so, Horn turns the act of looking implicit in the work of Schneeman, Chicago, Sherman and Kruger into an embodied encounter in which the viewer performs.

### **Minimalism**

Horn's concern with staging bodily experiences is one that can be traced back to the concerns of 1960s Minimalism. Emerging as an influential, although conceptually disparate, artistic tendency in America, Minimalism, in the work of artists such as Judd, Andre, Morris and Serra, was a practice largely concerned, as Frances Colpitt puts it, with a 'commitment to the abstract, anti-compositional, material *object*.'<sup>21</sup> The formal strategies conceived by these artists, in their various ways, pushed art in a new direction away from the predominantly retinal practices of early twentieth-century modernism championed by critics such as Clement Greenberg. Key in thinking through Minimalism's investment in embodied experience was a phenomenological concern with sculpture as a form of spatial intervention. Art historian Rosalind Krauss importantly engaged the philosophical writing of Maurice Merleau-Ponty to develop a critique of Minimalist practice that was sensitive to the perceptual conditions of viewing and to subject-object relations.<sup>22</sup> In this sense Krauss contends that Minimalist work represents 'a radical act of decentering' in which the abstracted forms negate the viewer's desire to project into the space of the sculpture. Yet, the

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<sup>21</sup> Frances Colpitt, *Minimal Art: A Critical Perspective* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1990), 1.

<sup>22</sup> Rosalind Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1981).

body of the viewer – or more specifically the bodily experience of the viewer – remains central in considering how these works operate.

Here we might think of wall works from Judd's *Untitled* series produced since the early 1960s [fig. 1.7], Andre's *144 Magnesium Squares* (1969) [fig. 1.8], Morris's *Untitled (L beams)* (1965) [fig. 1.9] or Serra's *One Ton Prop (House of Cards)* (1969) [fig. 1.10]. Each of these works engage the viewer as physical, corporeal entities; Judd's repeated modular forms extend from the wall into the viewer's space; Andre's floor-based work occupies a horizontal axis against which viewers must reorient themselves; Morris's heavy beams absorb the gallery simultaneously obscuring and activating different parts of the space and the objects within, challenging the perceptual limits of the viewer; Serra's precariously balanced forms dwarf the viewer suggesting the vulnerability of the fragile human body.

Krauss claimed that the primary objective of Minimalism was a declaration of the 'externality of meaning', a purpose that was accomplished by way of a 'dependence on the facts of the material object'.<sup>23</sup> Judd in particular championed the idea that his work should be understood not as sculpture per se but simply as objects. In his 'Specific Objects' (1965) essay, he writes that 'actual space is intrinsically more powerful and specific than paint on a flat surface' and goes on to argue that the viewer should be able to say nothing about his work that is not a description of the material properties and physical characteristics of the object.<sup>24</sup> These words are echoed in Morris's 'Notes on Sculpture' (1966–1967) where he asserts that the defining traits of sculpture, are those with 'qualities of scale, proportion, shape, mass' and 'physical [...] qualities [...] made visible by the adjustment of an obdurate, literal mass'.<sup>25</sup>

Morris, however, was also particularly interested in the experience of viewing his objects, writing that 'the awareness of scale is a function of [...] comparison. [...] Space between the subject and the object is implied in such a comparison. [...] it is just this distance between object and subject that creates a more extended situation,

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 266.

<sup>24</sup> Donald Judd, 'Specific Objects' in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (eds), *Art in Theory 1900–1990* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), 813.

<sup>25</sup> Robert Morris, 'Notes on Sculpture I and II' in Gregory Battcock (ed.), *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology* (New York: Dutton Press, 1968), 225.

for physical participation becomes necessary.’<sup>26</sup> Serra too saw his sculptures in terms of a kind of phenomenological intervention in space that manifest a fundamental reshaping of those spaces, and thus the experience of them. Alex Potts has described Andre’s work similarly as ‘activating inert empty space’, yet his work often does so not by introducing volumes into that space but ‘through the evacuating of full bodied shape and the flattening out of solid substance’.<sup>27</sup> Works such as *144 Magnesium Squares* thus rely on the viewer’s visual apprehension of the work as surface as much as on the physical presence and weight of the material.

These concerns are comparable to Horn’s own during the first part of her career. In an early series from 1976, Louise Nerli observes that Horn created works directly onto the floor using powdered graphite [fig. 1.11]. These abstract geometric forms presented an optical challenge to viewers, apparently changing shape as viewers moved and their perspective shifted. Nerli points out, however, that Horn abandoned these works unsatisfied by the way that the very optical nature of the pieces precluded more substantial bodily engagements.<sup>28</sup> In the following year Horn produced another series of works, again on the floor, but this time utilising a soft rubber material that moulded itself to the surface of the contours beneath it. *Untitled (Soft Rubber Wedge)* (1977) [fig. 1.12] takes the form of a long wedge of this material, a few centimetres thick at one end and tapering out to a thin layer through which the lumps and bumps of the floor underneath become increasingly visible. In this sense, Nerli has described these rubber works as being ‘half-object, half-place’.<sup>29</sup> The specific qualities of materiality, of optical and bodily apprehension, and the nature of objects, surfaces and substance, all of which were also important concerns for the minimalist artists I have mentioned, can be seen as key elements that Horn sets out to question and test in both of these works from the 1970s.

In a number of important ways then, Horn’s work relates to and inflects many of the concerns central to Minimalist narratives. Her practice clearly owes much to the new conceptualization of materiality, spaciality and embodiment that Minimalism

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 231.

<sup>27</sup> Alex Potts, *The Sculptural Imagination: Figurative, Modernist, Minimalist* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), 315, 312.

<sup>28</sup> Louise Nerli, ‘Survey’ in Louise Nerli, Lynne Cooke and Thierry de Duve, *Roni Horn* (London: Phaidon, 2000), 31.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 32.

stimulated. The reductive forms of Horn's work, exemplified by *Asphere*, along with her proclivity for the use of repetition, seriality and geometric structures, are certainly conventions that owe their currency to the visual rhetoric of minimalism. But beneath these often-cited commonalities, Horn's work demonstrates a more challenging relationship with Minimalist ideals. It is clear in looking more closely at works such as *Asphere* that Horn's sculpture provides a subtle critique to the purity of the self-contained object that is so central to the Minimalist project. Horn herself has stated that her practice is 'in many ways a criticism of Minimalism'.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe rightly comments that Horn's work retrospectively makes Minimalism look 'terribly like acts of homogenisation which do little more than repeat the great principles of the Renaissance in materialist terms [...]'.<sup>31</sup> Friend and fellow artist Felix Gonzalez-Torres has also observed that, 'some people dismiss Roni's work as pure formalism, as if such purity were possible after years of knowing that the act of looking at an object, any object, is transfigured by gender, race, socio-economic class, and sexual orientation [...]'.<sup>32</sup> Inasmuch as Horn's work, especially that of her early career, has been read in terms of formalist sculpture, then, it is evident that her practice is not solely concerned with rendering pure, autonomous sculptural forms.

A silent performance piece called *Ant Farm* (1974–1975) [fig. 1.13], produced slightly earlier than the two works discussed above while Horn was still an undergraduate student at the Rhode Island School of Art, signals the artist's interest in engaging broader themes of social and political concern.<sup>33</sup> Sandwiched between two sheets of glass held in place by a heavy oak frame, a colony of ants carries on its business of living within the self-contained environment. During the performance, Horn sat in front of the ant farm, watching it intently, following the movements of the ant community as they carried out their task. The ant farm itself reproduces what Louise Nerli has described as a 'habitat analogous to a human community in which

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<sup>30</sup> Roni Horn in conversation with Mimi Thompson in Betsy Sussler (ed.), *Bomb: Speak Art! The Best of Bomb Magazine's Interviews with Artists* (New York: New Art Publications, 1997), 86. First published in *BOMB*, No. 28 (Summer 1989).

<sup>31</sup> Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, *Beyond Piety: Critical Essays on the Visual Arts 1986-1993* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 218.

<sup>32</sup> Felix Gonzalez-Torres, '1990: L.A. "The Gold Field"' in Roni Horn, *Earths Grow Thick* (Columbus, Ohio: Wexner Centre for the Arts, 1996), unpaginated.

<sup>33</sup> *Ant Farm* was initially installed and performed in Horn's studio at the Rhode Island School of Design 1974–75. It was recently re-made for Horn's Tate Modern Retrospective 'Roni Horn aka Roni Horn', London, 2009, however no performance accompanied this display.

the insect-inhabitants ceaselessly investigate and reorganize space according to their social needs.’<sup>34</sup> Horn’s performance in this work is one that demonstrates a commitment to issues that extend beyond the strictly formal and intimate toward her interest in exploring perception as a cultural imperative; a concern that becomes so crucial in her later practice.

Anna C. Chave has argued that although writers such as Krauss have been successful in developing a formalist discourse around Minimalist practices, these works also need to be read in terms of the socio-political context in which they were produced. In ‘Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power’, Chave argues that Minimalism was implicated in the ‘reformulation of the configurations of power’ at the time of its making.<sup>35</sup> Describing it as a ‘domineering, sometimes brutal rhetoric’ she positions Minimalism as a distinctly masculine enterprise.<sup>36</sup> Issues of gender are not the sole target of her reading, however, as a regime of power, gender is of course very clearly of concern. Minimalism was a movement dominated almost entirely by male artists, and the objects of their production as well as the rhetoric that surrounded them was distinctly masculine in character. Both in the writings of its leading proponents, in particular Judd and Morris, as well as critical responses to the work of Minimalist artists, Chave notes that words such as ‘authority’, ‘strength’ and ‘unity’ were regularly cited as descriptors and terms of validation.<sup>37</sup>

This language, Chave suggests, demonstrates the dominant view that ‘what is rigorous and strong is valued while what is soft or flexible is comic or pathetic’.<sup>38</sup> Not only is this true within art-historical circles, it is indicative of the attitudes within the broader social world. As Chave notes, ‘the language used to esteem a work of art has come to coincide with language used to describe a human figure of authority, in other words, whether or not the speaker holds that figure in esteem.’<sup>39</sup> Since the masculine rather than the feminine body is that associated with principles of strength and power, it is thus man that society holds in esteem and who assumes authority. Chave goes on to

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<sup>34</sup> Nerli, 32.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 270.

<sup>36</sup> Anna C. Chave, ‘Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power’ in Holliday T. Day (ed.), *Power: Its Myths and Mores in American Art 1961–1991* (Indianapolis: Indianapolis Museum of Art, 1991).

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

argue that the Minimalist's 'valorization of power' can therefore be seen as reiterating power structures that privilege masculine, patriarchal regimes.<sup>40</sup> One way in which this masculine power is played out is through the concept of unity. Within the realm of art, unity is valued as a bringing together of compositional (and conceptual) elements to achieve a balanced, coherent whole. As Chave describes, 'unity is associated with identity and a successful work of art is understood to require a whole identity no less than an integrated person does.'<sup>41</sup>

Chave's feminist position here echoes the writing of Beauvoir and Butler and reflects the position of female artists who took up the task of readdressing the structures of Minimalist art from their own perspective. Artists such as Hesse, Benglis and Michelle Stuart, all of whom were represented in the 1996 exhibition 'More than Minimal: Feminism and Abstraction in the 70s', produced work that has been seen as a feminised reworking of minimalist forms in response to the closed-off austerity of the predominantly male minimalist aesthetic.<sup>42</sup> In her opening essay to the catalogue for this show Susan Stoops argues that the work of the eleven selected artists 'legitimised the role of female subjectivity in a fundamentally abstract aesthetic.'<sup>43</sup> She goes on to suggest that 'much of their work has come into existence through their acknowledgement and acceptance of female subjectivity',<sup>44</sup> each having produced 'a body of work that has absorbed the cumulative effects of her gendered "engagement" with the practices and issues of a post-war American art.'<sup>45</sup> She goes on to say that 'rather than accept "otherness" as her state and locate her discourse in the margins, each of these women chose to redefine the dominant idiom of minimalist abstraction as an affirmation of her experiences and values.'<sup>46</sup> It is this sense of empowering recourse to female subjectivity that underpins Stoop's curation.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> 'More than Minimal: Feminism and Abstraction in the 70s' was shown at the Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Waltham Massachusetts 21 April – 30 June 1996. Curated by Susan L. Stoops, the exhibition included work by eleven woman artists: Lynda Benglis, Jackie Ferrara, Nancy Graves, Eva Hesse, Ana Mendieta, Mary Miss, Ree Morton, Michelle Stuart, Dorothea Rockburne, Hannah Wilke and Jackie Winsor.

<sup>43</sup> Susan L. Stoops, 'An Introduction' in Susan L. Stoops (ed.), *More than Minimal: Feminism and Abstraction in the 70s* (Waltham, Mass.: Rose Art Museum, 1996), 6.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 11.

For example, in Hesse's *Accession II* (1967–1969) [fig. 1.14] the authoritative structure of the Minimalist cube is destabilised by drilling holes over each steel surface and then threading through lengths of rubber tubing. The effect is to create a more vulnerable, tactile work in which crafting of the object moves away from industrial manufacture toward a more typically feminine aesthetic, referencing practices like needlework and tapestry that have traditionally been associated with women's work. The later work of Janine Antoni similarly fits this *modus operandi*. Antoni's three-piece work *Gnaw* (1992) [fig. 1.15], for example, includes two large cubic forms, made respectively of chocolate and lard, which are displayed on marble plinths; each of the blocks has literally been gnawed around the edges by the artist.<sup>47</sup> Here the Minimalist cube has been re-fashioned from more organic, malleable materials. The hard-edges of each cube are worn down by Antoni as her teeth cut into, and effectively sculpt, the monolithic blocks, re-establishing connections between the body of the artist and the object she creates.

Unlike much 'post-minimalist' work, however, Horn's practice – through its sense of 'in-between-ness' and use of doubling – enacts a more complex idea of gender. Horn's work is not a 'female version' of Minimalism, but takes a view of subjectivity beyond the polarised gender categories that have been the source of so much debate within discourses of feminism and identity. Horn's work instead resonates in the space *between* these identities. Unlike Minimalism, Horn's objects do not function as singular forms. Her paired works, alternatively, invoke multiple relationships and experiences as an integral part of their being. Her works cultivate an in-between-ness that questions the concept of unity that Chave finds so fundamental to Minimalist discourse and practice. They also, however, present a challenge to notions of discrete female identities. Through the duplication of forms and the processes of transgression and transfer that are played out in works such as the *Pair Objects*, Horn shifts her discourse away from both formalist concerns with unity and the resurrection of the female voice. Instead, her works espouse an indeterminate identity that is neither strictly associated with either rhetoric but draws on both.

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<sup>47</sup> The third part of this work consists of a chocolate box tray and set of lipsticks made respectively from the chocolate and lard expectorated by the artist during the process of 'gnawing' the large blocks.

Staging the experience of in-between-ness, then, is the real challenge of Horn's work. In her suite *Things That Happen Again* (1986–1991) [fig. 1.16], this in-between-ness is clearly the governing principle of the work. Composed of four pairs of objects, each with its own title that suggests a particular relationship between the pieces, these works operate through a carefully choreographed engagement between object, space and viewer. Each pair consists of two identical solid copper cones, which have each been hand-lathed to duplicate the forms with as much precision as possible, and as the titles suggest – *Piece for Two Rooms*, *A Here and a There*, *A This and a That*, *Things That are Near* – positioning of the works is crucial. In *Piece for Two Rooms*, each object is displayed in a separate discrete space so that it is impossible to view both at the same time. The two objects of *A Here and a There* and *A This and a That* occupy the same space but are kept at a distance from one another. *Things that are Near*, alternatively, pairs the objects in close proximity. Viewers of each of these paired objects must negotiate the time and space between each form in order to view the 'whole' work. Moving from one space to another, back and forth across the gallery floor and around the objects, the viewer must use their full body to engage with the objects. The apparent sameness of the objects prompts a repeated movement between them, where the viewer is frustratingly compelled to participate in a game of memory, comparing the two in an attempt to verify their identity as unique or otherwise. The repetition of the identical shapes in these *Pair Objects* recalls, for example, Morris's *L Beams*. Krauss described the experience of looking at this installation, stating that, 'although the viewer knows they are the same it is impossible to see them as the same.'

The "fact" of the objects' similarity belongs to a logic that exists *prior* to experience; because at the moment of experience, or *in* experience, the L's defeat this logic and are "different".<sup>48</sup> Whether the *L Beams* or Horn's *Pair Objects* are in fact identical becomes of little consequence and perception instead emerges as a more important concern. There is no singular point at which the paired objects can be apprehended in total, but rather viewing becomes a cumulative process. Horn's placement of the objects is one that usurps any pretence to an easily recognizable identity raising, I think, a series of questions: What are you? Are you the same? Are you different? How are you different and what does that difference mean?

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<sup>48</sup> Krauss, 267.



Butler's argument that 'gender is constructed through specific corporeal acts' is significant in thinking through the performative aspects of Horn's *Pair Objects*. If gender identities are formed and consolidated through repetition of gender-specific social norms, then Horn's works become meaningful in their ability to disrupt the hegemony of these acts. By foregrounding the structure of repetition, works such as *Things that Happen Again* create a rupture from within. This rupture is deployed through an artistic strategy of doubling that engages the viewer of the work as an embodied subject whilst playing out the very ambiguities of the androgynous self.

This represents a more complex understanding of the relationality at work in Horn's sculptures than has been identified by commentators such as Philip Larratt-Smith. He remarks that, 'Horn's paired objects are portraits of relationships that reflect the human condition as well as her own need to define herself.'<sup>49</sup> Rather than simply existing as *representations* of human relationships these works actually engage the viewer to *perform*, to re-enact, the systems that allow such relations and identities to be constructed. By prompting viewers to perform these repetitions in a bodily way within the social microcosm of the gallery space, Horn's work brings to light the power of binary oppositions and their silent reiteration, but also systematically problematises their validity. It is through this performativity, then, that Horn's work has the capacity to function as a reconstructive tool. Horn's work does not take the role of 'woman' as its focus. In her practice, identity is positioned as a more complex proposition. Interested in foregrounding neither male or female concerns, her work explores the in-between-ness of androgyny but in doing so maps out a space in which to re-think, or re-perform, identity in a more general sense.

### **Androgyny**

A significant problem with the closed-off fictive gender categories described by Butler, is their inability to account for gender roles that do not fit such prescribed models. As Beauvoir and Butler have pointed out, these kinds of singular identities do not account for gendered selves that exist outside of – or in-between – the dichotomy of man/woman. Butler astutely comments therefore, that 'those who fail to do their

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<sup>49</sup> Philip Larratt-Smith, 'Things That Happen Again' in Beth Huseman (ed.), *Roni Horn aka Roni Horn: Subject Index* (London: Tate Publishing, 2009), 138.

gender right are regularly punished' and cast as 'other' to the normative gender binary.<sup>50</sup> Horn's otherness, then, is not to be found in the role of suppressed woman but in her sense of androgyny, a problematic gendering – in terms of the discussions above – which suggests neither a uniquely female nor male subjectivity. Where feminist discourse has identified the 'othering' of female identity in relation to the dominant male, androgyny presents itself as other to the heterosexual norm – to both male and female.

Kari Weil, in the final chapter of her book *Androgyny and the Denial of Difference*, tracks a number of important arguments regarding the place of androgyny within feminist discourse.<sup>51</sup> Her analysis addresses the main texts on the subject and is therefore worth considering at some length here. She maps out three particular strands of thought in her study, each demonstrating the ways in which feminism has conceptualised androgyny. She begins by discussing Caroline Heilbrun's *Toward a Recognition of Androgyny*, published in 1982.<sup>52</sup> In this book Heilbrun posits androgyny as 'a movement away from sexual polarization and the prison of gender toward a world in which individual roles and the modes of personal behaviour can be freely chosen.'<sup>53</sup> Androgyny, for Heilbrun, is removed from feminism *per se* and is understood likewise as distinct from homosexuality or bisexuality. What it represents is a state in which both male and female are accounted for equally.

Heilbrun's argument finds resonance in feminist writers such as Cynthia Secor, Nancy Topping Bazin and Alma Freeman. Writing in the introduction to 'The Androgyny Papers', a special issue of the journal *Women's Studies* in 1974, Secor describes androgyny as 'the capacity of a single person of either sex to embody a full range of human character traits, despite cultural attempts to render some exclusively feminine and some exclusively masculine.'<sup>54</sup> In Secor's view androgyny does not simply refer to a biologically derived sense of one's sexuality, but rather suggests an identity that does not fit neatly into Western society's culturally encoded gender roles. Bazin and Freeman also write of the experience of androgyny as the 'experience of

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<sup>50</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 522.

<sup>51</sup> Kari Weil, *Androgyny and the Denial of Difference* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992).

<sup>52</sup> Caroline Heilbrun, *Toward a Recognition of Androgyny* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1973).

<sup>53</sup> Caroline Heilbrun quoted in Weil, 147.

<sup>54</sup> Cynthia Secor, 'The Androgyny Papers', *Women's Studies*, Vol. 2, 1974, 139.

wholeness'.<sup>55</sup> Developing from the field of Women's Studies and the popular rise of feminist critique during the 1970s, they suggest an 'androgynous ideal' whereby each individual is able to express the full range of human experiences and feelings regardless of their sex.<sup>56</sup> More recently Carolynn Lund-Mead has echoed this view, arguing that androgyny functions in the same way as heterosexual union in 'a positive sense to express the containing of plurality in unity, the overcoming of division, the crossing of organic, psychological, and ontological boundaries.'<sup>57</sup>

These positions attempt to present androgyny as a positive and inclusive designation based on an idea of 'wholeness' but, as Weil points out, they pose problems 'for those wishing to assert a different set of aesthetic assumptions as well as a different subjectivity, [and who do not want to] risk appropriation by or effacement within the "whole" of a classical patriarchal order.'<sup>58</sup> Nor, I think, do they sit satisfactorily with Horn's personal accounts of what it means to be androgynous. For Horn the experience is one of difference rather than unity; androgyny means being neither fully male nor fully female. It is a liminal space, one of in-between-ness and the defamiliar. In creating an ideal androgynous subject, perspectives such as those outlined above refuse difference and replace it instead with sameness, resulting in a repetition of the same criticisms leveled at Beauvoir; in striving for 'sameness' woman must again seek an 'equal' position in relation to man *within* hierarchies of male domination.

The second approach to androgyny that Weil outlines is associated with the work of Elaine Showalter. Showalter's 1977 book *A Literature of Their Own* discusses androgyny in response to the work of Virginia Woolf, in particular her novel *Orlando* (1928) and extended essay *A Room of One's Own* (1929).<sup>59</sup> In *Orlando* the central character switches between male and female gender roles as he/she travels through the timescape of the book.<sup>60</sup> *A Room of One's Own*, in a similar way, abandons any sense

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<sup>55</sup> Nancy Topping Bazin and Alma Freeman, 'The Androgynous Vision', *Women's Studies*, Vol. 2, 1974, 185.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Carolynn Lund-Mead, 'Dante and Androgyny' in Amilicare A. Lannucci (ed.), *Dante: Contemporary Perspectives* (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 195.

<sup>58</sup> Weil, 147.

<sup>59</sup> Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999). Originally published 1977.

<sup>60</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Orlando* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

of fixed identity by constructing a tale told from multiple points of view.<sup>61</sup> Here Woolf presents, in more concrete terms, her belief that true creativity must come from a union of the male and female minds that should ‘live in harmony together, spiritually cooperating’.<sup>62</sup> However, for Showalter, androgyny in the hands of Woolf is not a matter of sexual liberation but an attempt to escape the painful confines of her womanhood. She argues that Woolf’s androgyny is a myth created in an attempt to suppress the desires and aspirations that she could not easily achieve as a woman. ‘How could any woman writer’ she asks, ‘pretend to be androgynous – indifferent, undivided [...] ? At some level, Woolf is aware that androgyny is another form of repression or, at best, self-discipline.’<sup>63</sup> Weil sums up this argument when she states that, for Showalter ‘androgyny is a myth that distanced Woolf from herself and from the claims of her woman’s body, a myth that allowed her to dream of sexual equality all the while that it reconfirmed the dominance of the masculine.’<sup>64</sup> Showalter’s critique of Woolf is indicative of a new feminist approach – one that was focused on the expression of ‘female experience’.<sup>65</sup> What Showalter sought was a form of feminist literature engaged in telling stories from a distinctly female perspective, works that celebrated, in particular, the experience of the female body and its unique functions.<sup>66</sup>

This form of feminist critique, termed ‘gynocentrism’, was also associated with writers such as Mary Daly. Although Daly had endorsed androgyny as a model of ‘psychic wholeness’ in her book *Beyond God the Father* of 1973, by 1978 she had turned against this, calling androgyny a ‘semantic abomination’.<sup>67</sup> In *Gyn/Ecology* she accuses the ‘pseudowholeness’ of androgyny of being a ‘deceptive trap’, writing that: ‘When we heard the word echoed back by those who misinterpreted our thought we realised that combining the “halves” offered to consciousness by patriarchal language usually results in portraying something more like a hole than a whole.’<sup>68</sup> Of more import to Daly was a sexual difference that foregrounded female characteristics

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<sup>61</sup> Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own* (London: Penguin, 2000).

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>63</sup> Showalter, 288.

<sup>64</sup> Weil, 150.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Woman’s Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973). Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990), 387.

<sup>68</sup> Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, 387.

as the potential site for female emancipation. Where writers such as Heilbrun and Secor championed wholeness, then, Showalter's and Daly's more radical positions re-asserted female difference: a difference that must be located in the peculiarities of the female body.

Weil's tripartite discussion of the androgyne within the rhetoric of feminism finally turns to the work of Toril Moi. Moi presents a re-reading of Woolf that moves beyond humanistic aesthetic categories, ultimately arguing that the categories of male and female must themselves be false.<sup>69</sup> In *Sexual/Textual Politics* Moi argues that Showalter fundamentally misreads Woolf by not taking her modernist writing style into account. For Moi, Showalter is too concerned with realist narratives that relate stories about what it is to be and to live as a woman. What makes Woolf's texts inaccessible to Showalter, Moi claims, is her non-realist, experimental approach to writing. According to Moi, however, this is precisely the success of Woolf's work. What Woolf is able to achieve through her writing is a means of problematising identity itself. Through shifts in point of view (from I to he to we), an anti-linear structure and the use of literary devices such as ellipses that break up the text, Woolf's writing stylistically enacts a visioning of androgyny as unbounded and undefinable. Woolf's 'deconstructive' approach is valuable in its turn away from the oppositional confrontation of man/woman, suggesting as Weil notes that 'the boundaries of identity, or those between identities, are not (god-) given.'<sup>70</sup>

Moi's reading of Woolf is helpful, I think, for understanding another of Horn's works. Her 1998 works *Ellipsis I* [fig. 1.17] and *Ellipsis II* [fig. 1.18] make use of a similar set of shifting viewpoints and disruptive breaks, clearly taking their cue from the linguistic tools that Woolf also experimented with. Each of the *Ellipsis* works is a chessboard-like arrangement of sixty four black and white photographs in which both groupings feature a different configuration of the same images. The photographs detail the inside of a locker room at a public swimming pool in Reykjavík. The internal structure of the locker room is labyrinthine: a series of white tiled corridors with evenly-spaced changing room doors where individual numbers on each door provide the only points of spatial differentiation. As a punctuation device the ellipsis

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<sup>69</sup> Weil, 153.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 154.

is one that allows for omissions or pauses in the text. It can refer to parts of the text that have been cut off, as in an ellipsis at the end of a sentence, or it might indicate a subject or phrase that cannot be uttered. It is also a syntactic tool that alludes to the relationship between part and whole, inviting us to read what has not in fact been written. The juxtaposed fragments in Horn's *Ellipsis* works also represent parts of a whole. The photographs are a collection of disjointed views that offer multiple perspectives but do not add up to a totality. Like the missing words alluded to by the textual ellipsis, Horn's *Ellipsis* photographs invite the viewer to imaginatively reconstruct what is missing. However this is a task that can never fully be fulfilled. The series of peep holes, doors and cubicles echo the tensions between what can and cannot be seen that defines the ellipsis. The push and pull of spatial depth that occurs in the juxtaposition of long corridors leading away to a vanishing point, of more closely-shot flat images of the doors and walls and mirrors reflecting spaces that are outside of the camera's view, in a similar way suggest different perspectives or ways of seeing. Images are repeated but so too there are photographs that appear to be doubles, only later to be discerned for their subtle variations. This is symptomatic of the old-fashioned locker room in all its monochromatic formal regularity. What Horn's constellation of images points out is that even within such a rigid institutional space, difference abounds.

French writer and philosopher Hélène Cixous has argued against the idea of unity and asexuality associated with androgyny and instead has proposed a 'vatic bisexuality' that not only allows for differences but actively 'stirs them up, pursues them.'<sup>71</sup> Having collaborated on a number of projects with Horn, Cixous's philosophy is clearly significant here and represents a theory of identity which is closely linked to the concerns of her own work. In *Index Cixous*, Horn takes Cixous as the subject of a photographic suite that has been both published as a book and realised as an installation. Cixous has also written text for catalogues of Horn's work such as *A Kind of You: 6 Portraits by Roni Horn* (2007), and was one of four contributors to Horn's *Wonderwater (Alice of Shore)* (2004) book project.<sup>72</sup> Another overlap in their

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<sup>71</sup> Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa' in Marta Segarra (ed.), *The Portable Cixous* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 36.

<sup>72</sup> See: Hélène Cixous and Roni Horn, *A Kind of You: 6 Portraits by Roni Horn* (Gottingen: Steidl, 2009); Roni Horn, *Wonderwater (Alice Offshore)* (Gottingen: Steidl, 1994). *Wonderwater* is a collection of four books on which Horn collaborated with Louise Bourgeois, Anne Carson, Hélène

practices is also evident in their respective treatments of Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector's work: Cixous's books *Vivre l'orange* (1979) and 'L'Approche de Clarice Lispector' (1979), and Horn's *Rings of Lispector (Agua Viva)* (2004) [fig. 1.19].<sup>73</sup>

In *Rings of Lispector*, an exhibition initially conceived for Hauser & Wirth gallery, London, Horn created an installation in which the gallery's entire floor area was covered in rubber tiles inlaid with extracts of text from Lispector's *Agua Viva Stream of Life* (1973). Translated by Cixous, the selected lines were configured into circular forms so that, looking from above, they echoed the concentric rings sent out by raindrops as they hit the surface of water. In an article titled 'Faire voir le jamaisvu/See the neverbefore seen' Cixous responded to *Rings of Lispector* analysing the way that Horn's work echoed Lispector's words, playing on the parallels between the visual and the verbal in her installation. Mairéad Hanrahan rehearses Cixous's thought in a subsequent article where she says that Horn's work represents an act of translation in which what is made visible must also stand as a reminder of what is invisible. So too, she writes that the installation 'evokes what cannot be heard [...] and what cannot be touched. This visual work that makes words into tactile experience [...] succeeds in conveying a sense of the intangible.'<sup>74</sup>

The unfolding tensions between the visible and invisible, the tangible and the intangible that Cixous finds in this installation are concerns that are also mirrored in her own writings about gender, in particular the idea of bisexuality. Cixous's notion of bisexuality is one that I think fits well with a *deconstructed* androgyny and Horn's sense of being neither one thing or another. In her 1975 essay 'The Laugh of the Medusa', Cixous had already begun to figure an idea of identity that rejected the unity of a total being but for her male and female categories had not been dissolved or proved false. Rather, she suggested that the masculine and feminine are not the exclusive attributes of male and female identity but are traits available to both. Cixous's conception of bisexuality moved against the traditional definition, which she suggested was also an homogenising term born of the male imagination in order to

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Cixous and John Waters. In one book each, these artists and writers respond in their own unique ways to a selection of Horn's titles/phrases.

<sup>73</sup> See: Hélène Cixous, *Vivre l'orange* (Paris: Des Femmes, 1979); Hélène Cixous, 'L'Approche de Clarice Lispector', *Poétique*, No. 40, November 1979, 408–419; Roni Horn, *Rings of Lispector (Agua Viva)* (Gottingen: Steidl, 2006).

<sup>74</sup> Mairéad Hanrahan, 'Countersigning Painting: Hélène Cixous's Art of Writing about Painting', *The European Legacy*, Vol. 14, No. 1, 2009, 10.

mitigate fear of the female other. Cixous's bisexuality was alternatively one that, as Catriona MacLeod has argued, 'celebrated instead a nomadic bisexuality signaled by instability, multiplicity, and mutability.'<sup>75</sup>

The notion of instability and mutability suggested by Cixous, sits well, I think, with Horn's work. Androgyny, as I see it in Horn's work, is a mode of identification that foregrounds the possibility of multiple identities that are always open to change. Like Cixous, Horn's work is not so much concerned with how identity is formed in relation to being male or female but how it might be conceived as a space of infinite potentiality between this dichotomy. This idea of 'in-between-ness' is performed by viewers of Horn's work in their embodied interactions with her objects and images, and in doing so they experience the indeterminacy of identity.

Cixous intimates a relation between self and body that is founded on such indeterminacy when she writes:

... what Roni Horn has meditated on ... are the figures of her secret questions ... "Who are you, Face, you who I am, whom I follow, you who look at me without seeing me, you whom I see without knowing whom, you in whom I look at myself, you who would not be without me, you whom I envelop, you who seduce me and into whom I do not enter, who are you, who is this being promised subjected to my gaze, to my objective, this being docile to my law, and who remains totally impenetrable for me? What is you? Who am I, you?"<sup>76</sup>

This intriguing passage suggests two different kinds of mirroring; a mirroring of Horn's 'I' through a 'you' that is other, and a mirroring of the artist back on herself. In both cases a dynamic exchange is set in motion. The first proposition gestures toward an experience that reflects the way in which gender is constructed and imposed from the outside; an experience, in the case of androgyny, of confusion resulting, as Butler has put it, from one's inability to do their gender 'right'. Such a reading signals the social construction of identity, which does not simply rest in an innate sense of self; it is built up through a reciprocal encounter between the 'I' and

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<sup>75</sup> Catriona MacLeod, *Embodying Ambiguity: Androgyny and Aesthetics from Winckelmann to Keller* (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1998), 18.

<sup>76</sup> Hélène Cixous, 'Portraits of Portraits: The Very Day/Light of Roni Horn' in *A Kind of You: 6 Portraits by Roni Horn*, 7.



the 'you'. The 'I' is thus only constituted in relation to the 'You' that it perceives. At the same time, the complicated process of recognition/non-recognition that Cixous recites is one that captures the potential of identity to exist as continually shifting, unable to be precisely pinned down. The answers to the questions Cixous ventriloquises for Horn can thus never be answered; or put another way, the answers can never be punctuated by a full-stop. Taken as a conversation between Horn and her own reflection, Cixous's invented dialogue conjures an experience in which the 'I' does not recognise him/herself; a moment where the 'I' does not find her/himself expressed in the body reflected back in the mirror. This sense of disorientation, between knowing and not knowing, is very much the same kind of sensation that comes from moving between the *Pair Objects* or scrutinizing the *Asphere* for signs of sameness and difference.

Juergen Teller's 2009 photographic portrait of Horn [fig. 1.20] suggests just this kind of shifting sense of recognition/non-recognition.<sup>77</sup> This photograph, of course, is not strictly part of Horn's oeuvre but it is nonetheless useful in coming to terms with the problematic of gender and the body that informs her practice. The image is undoubtedly one in whose production Horn has been involved. It is certainly no mistake, I would argue, that the portrait connects so intimately with the themes that have occupied her work throughout her career. Horn sits on the rooftop balcony of her New York apartment. She is relaxed, leaning back on a bench pouring a glass of red wine. She wears a pair of blue jeans and a men's dress jacket but her chest is bare, revealing her breasts to the viewer. What is particularly striking about the image is the way that Horn complicates our expectations of gender through the presentation of her own body. The clothing she wears and her bodily gestures, particularly the casual slouch and open legs, as well as her short cropped hair, seem to mimic the 'stylised acts', to use Butler's terminology, of masculinity. Yet the image of her exposed breasts, corporeal signifiers of female sexuality, leads in the opposite direction: to woman. My own response to the photograph is one of discomfort. As I look, I try to make sense of the gender cues that are before me, but of course these do not easily fit

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<sup>77</sup> Juergen Teller's photograph accompanies the article: Julie L. Belcove, 'Roni Horn', *W Magazine*, November 2009, 150–159. Teller is widely known as a fashion photographer and has collaborated with designers and fashion labels including Marc Jacobs, Helmut Lang, Yves Saint Laurent and Vivienne Westwood. His work has been exhibited at Le Consortium, Dijon (2010); Tate Modern, London (2008); and the Foundation Cartier Pour l'art Contemporain, Paris (2007). Teller was also one of five artists selected to represent the Ukraine at the 2007 Venice Biennale.

with the discrete and socially sanctioned ideas of gender that prevail in contemporary Western culture and with which I am familiar. This is underscored by the sense of ambiguity and strangeness that I perceive in the image; my desire to make sense of it, to place her identity, and my limited ability to do so. My discomfort arises from the realisation that I, as a viewing subject, am complicit in the reiteration of these ideas. What is particularly interesting about Teller's portrait of Horn, then, is the same sense of disorientation that we find in works such as *Asphere* and *Things that Happen Again*.

As an openly gay woman, Horn has frequently commented on the incommensurability of aligning herself with singular gender typologies. She constructs her own identity, alternatively, as constantly shifting, open to renewal and change. We see this ably played out in one of Horn's most obviously self-referential work, *aka* (2008–2009) [fig. 1.21–1.23], a photographic project first exhibited at the Whitney Museum of Modern Art installation of 'Roni Horn aka Roni Horn'. This series features a sequence of paired self-portraits – snapshot photographs of Horn culled from the family album – that picture the artist at different stages in her life, from baby to middle age. The series began life as a set of end pages designed for the exhibition catalogue of 'Roni Horn aka Roni Horn', but was ultimately turned into an installation piece composed of fifteen sets of photographs. Recent displays of this work – and one must remember that Horn's works are constantly open to re-presentation – have placed evenly spaced pairs of images around the gallery walls so that conversation takes place between these sets, as well as between the individual photographs in each pair. The photographs in each pair, taken years apart, are each carefully matched so that the images appear so different they could almost be taken for pictures of different people. Between each image in the pair we notice physical changes in the artist as she grows older; changes which reflect the instability and changing nature of identity.

### **Photography and Autobiography**

Within Horn's practice, *aka* stands out as a work that seems to carry a more overt autobiographical and potentially narrative element while addressing the same critical questions posed in works like *Asphere*. The reason for this is twofold: firstly, Horn makes *her own body* visible to the viewer, and secondly, this body is presented

through the medium of photography. Describing her photo-installation *You are the Weather* (1994–1995) [fig. 1.24], Thierry de Duve has echoed Horn, asserting that ‘the trouble with photography is that, being inescapably figurative, its content is all too easily confused with its subject matter.’<sup>78</sup> Horn has signaled her irritation at the tendency of photography (especially in her practice) to be read in terms of its referential capacity. Responding to a question from Kunsthau Bregenz museum director Yilmaz Dziewior in the exhibition catalogue to her solo show *Well and Truly*, she says, ‘for me, I can’t abide that mentality where, because you have a photograph of a person or something real, it’s more accessible and therefore more meaningful.’<sup>79</sup> In a recent essay on Horn’s work Mark Godfrey too has remarked on the artist’s indifference to commenting on the specific qualities of the photographic medium itself: ‘though she started to show her work around the time of the ‘Pictures’ exhibition (1977), Horn was not interested in representation and photography’s function in the image world. She has contested problematic ways of categorising identity, but has rarely occupied herself with photography’s role in the construction of subjectivity [...]’.<sup>80</sup>

Despite these claims, I argue that in many of Horns photographic works the nature of the photographic medium is of some considerable importance to the way in which the work functions. This is certainly true of *aka*. The meaning of *aka* relies on the idea that each photograph presents an image of the same person, although, as Horn has observed, the viewer may not at first be aware of this: ‘most visitors looking at it’, she says, ‘did not realise that this was the same person being portrayed. Obviously I was pushing that aspect of it in the way I juxtaposed the images, but I really didn’t think people would fall for it.’<sup>81</sup> By pairing the images so that the correspondence between photographs is purposefully oblique, Horn sets out to challenge the viewers’ perception of what they see and again to provoke a second look. In this work, however, the second glance is not immediately initiated. While the differences

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<sup>78</sup> Thierry de Duve, ‘You are the Weather’, 78.

<sup>79</sup> Roni Horn in conversation with Yilmaz Dziewior in Yilmaz Dziewior (ed.), *Roni Horn: Well and Truly* (Bergenz: Kunsthau Bregenz, 2010), 22.

<sup>80</sup> Mark Godfrey, ‘Roni Horn’s Icelandic Encyclopedia’, *Art History*, Vol. 32, No. 5, December 2009, 934. The ‘Pictures’ exhibition, curated by Douglas Crimp, was held at Artists Space, New York, in 1977. It included work by five artists: Robert Longo, Jack Goldstein, Sherrie Levine, Troy Brauntuch and Philip Smith. This was followed up by an essay of the same title two year’s later. See: Douglas Crimp, ‘Pictures’, *October*, No. 8, Spring 1979, 75–88.

<sup>81</sup> Horn in conversation with Yilmaz Dziewior, 22.

between individual images are immediately apparent, it is not until the viewer makes the connection that all the photos are of one person that the need to revisit initial assumptions about the work becomes apparent. For the viewer this means rethinking the relationship between the images in each pair, but also the way that each pair functions within the larger group of doubled portraits.

The idea that these photographs, all of which picture the artist herself, should be apprehended as images of multiple different individuals is one that fits easily with the kind of shifting identities that Horn has espoused. When dealing with images that capture the likeness of one person over the course of a lifetime, sameness, like singular static identities, becomes an impossibility. In *aka* a black and white image of a young Horn, wearing a head band and pigtails sits alongside a colour photograph of the artist, perhaps in her late teens or early twenties, with short curly hair and shy downward gaze. Another pair features a recent picture of Horn with glasses and closely-cropped, greying hair next to another childhood image where her long, slightly wavy hair is pulled back from her face. Only difference can be found between the images, and difference rather than sameness thus emerges as the foundation of identity.

A counterpoint worth considering is Christian Boltanski's 1972 series, *Ten Photographic Portraits of Christian Boltanski; 1946–1964* [fig. 1.25]. The tableau is comprised of ten sequential photographs, each of which supposedly depicts a portrait of the artist at various ages between two and twenty years. As is customary of Boltanski, these are found photographs and none in fact represent the artist himself. Ostensibly, they are all depictions of the same individual, and yet they are all different. None is more truthful than another, their truth is merely context dependant, existing in relation to time and change.

In 1955, C. S. Peirce, in his now famous treatise on sign-types, designated the photograph an index: 'Photographs, especially instantaneous photographs, are very instructive, because we know that they are in certain respects exactly like the objects

they represent.’<sup>82</sup> More recently Rosalind Krauss, in her essay *Notes on the Index*, has re-articulated this definition. She writes: ‘as distinct from symbols, indexes establish their meaning along the axis of a physical relationship to their referents.’<sup>83</sup> This implies that the relationship between the photographic image and its referent is not simply arbitrary but causal. Unlike purely iconic forms of art such as painting or drawing that represent through shared appearance, the photograph is also of the order of objects whose character ‘entails actual contiguity’.<sup>84</sup> These statements thus point to the photograph’s ability to establish an embodied relationship between subject and viewer of the image. The indexical nature of the photograph confirms, for the viewer, the necessarily ‘real’ existence of an embodied subject before the camera. The indexical nature of the photograph is one which, as Roland Barthes wrote in 1980, confirms the referent as ‘not the *optionally* real thing to which an image or sign refers but the *necessarily* real thing which has been placed before the lens, without which there would be no photograph.’<sup>85</sup> Recognition of this physical body is one that reflects the viewer’s own embodiment back on them. In *aka*, however, the viewer is made aware of their embodiment not just through their relation to the images but also in their movement between the photographic pairs. These images thus provide as much of a performative experience as do Horn’s sculptural works. Like Horn’s frustration at the viewer’s desire to construct narrative in works like *Pi*, Horn defies the expectation that the photographs in *aka* function only as representational, mimetic devices.

Like our assumptions of the spherical being of *Asphere*, Horn notes that, ‘identity takes over your actual being because you get stuck with whatever it is you resemble to other people – not who you are. They’re not necessarily the same thing.’<sup>86</sup> She too, clearly recognises the role of the viewing subject in the way that identities are formed and reproduced. The resemblance she speaks of is akin to Butler’s ‘repetition of acts’ in that to acknowledge resemblance is to measure what one sees or experiences against what one already ‘knows’. The affirmation of these resemblances is thus a

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<sup>82</sup> C. S. Peirce, ‘Logic as Semiotic: The Theory of Signs’ in J. Buchler (ed.), *Philosophical Writings of Peirce* (New York: Dover Publications, 1955), 106.

<sup>83</sup> Rosalind Krauss, ‘Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America’, *October*, Vol. 3 Spring 1977, 70.

<sup>84</sup> Rosalind Krauss & Jane Livingston, *L’Amour Fou: Photography and Surrealism* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1985), 31.

<sup>85</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 76–77. Originally published in French in 1980.

<sup>86</sup> Roni Horn, interview, ‘Words & Pictures’, <http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/horn/clip2.html>, unpaginated, accessed 27 May 2007.

self-fulfilling affirmation of the fictive codes on which they are based. Yet, Horn's statement also seems to suggest that a more authentic identity exists beneath the skin of this resemblance – one that can only really be known by individuals themselves. When she speaks of an '*actual* being' and 'who you *are*', an essentialist sensibility begins to emerge. This is at odds with the ideas of mutability that her work proposes, but I suggest that despite the semantic implications of the statement it is really intended to emphasise the degree to which cultural pressures work to shape gender identities.

Marjorie Perloff has summed up Barthes's concern with notions of authenticity and the real in his later texts, including his 1968 essay 'The Death of the Author' and *Camera Lucida*, as a 'phenomenology of authentication'.<sup>87</sup> The veracity of autobiography and photography's evidentiary claims have, in the light of this mode of thinking, necessarily been re-thought. In 'The Death of the Author', Barthes argues that the modern author has 'tyrannically' occupied the centre of the text as creator and locus of its meaning.<sup>88</sup> 'The explanation of a work', he contends, 'is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end, through the more or less transparent allegory of the fiction, the voice of a single person, the author 'confiding' in us.'<sup>89</sup> By centering the author in this way, however, difference is suppressed. His own pseudo-autobiographical text *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, performs the fragmentation of the subject through its collection and re-presentation of personal photographs alongside a non-conventional assemblage of textual fragments that disturb the structure of traditional narrative.<sup>90</sup> Jane Gallop has claimed that the 'death of the author' provides 'a way of separating the text from any human who might have lived in a body.'<sup>91</sup> *aka* insists on the embodied author, but only to the extent that this is reflected through the embodied viewer.

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<sup>87</sup> Marjorie Perloff, 'What has Occurred Only Once' in Liz Wells (ed.), *The Photography Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 34.

<sup>88</sup> Roland Barthes, 'Death of the Author' in David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery (eds), *The Book History Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 221.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010). First published in 1977. For a discussion of this text and its relation to autobiography see: Rachel Gabara, 'Autobiography of Himself: *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* by Roland Barthes' in *From Split to Screened Selves: French and Francophone Autobiography in the Third Person* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 1–22.

<sup>91</sup> Jane Gallop, *Thinking Through the Body* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 19.

When engaging with Horn's work we are usually only aware of her as producer of the images, objects and experiences we encounter. Her work has tended to avoid direct personal narratives, exploring identity instead through more abstract or poetic means. An example of this reticence to invoke overt narrative structures is evidenced in a comment about the work *Pi* (1998) [fig. 1.26]. *Pi* is an installation composed of forty five colour and black and white photographs, in which the images ostensibly revolve around the lives of an elderly Icelandic couple, Hildur and Björn [fig. 1.27]. The photographs feature pictures of Hildur and Björn and the eider-down they collect and dry out in their home; stills taken from an American soap opera that the couple regularly watch; as well as images of the rural Icelandic landscape in which they live and work. More than documenting the lives of these two individuals, however, *Pi* is concerned with the cyclic passing of time – seasons, tides, daily routines. Responding to the potential for narrative in this work, Horn says:

Were I to have gone too specifically into them [Hildur and Björn] I would have wound up with a narrative or a more descriptive relationship to the subject, which I didn't want. I wasn't so concerned with the fact that they were old, but with the intricate qualities of their physiognomies which you don't get with younger people, for the obvious reason that aging is a dimension which becomes more apparent in the face with time.<sup>92</sup>

The very idea of a cohesive narrative suggests the kind of patriarchal structures of control and identity building that Horn's work seeks to eschew. What is certainly interesting about this work, and *aka*, however, is that it toys with the viewer's desire to make sense of the images and piece together a story. What Horn presents seems almost like a puzzle in which related pieces, if assembled correctly, will tell the whole story. Each of the images in *Pi* is doubled within the installation so that there is an uncanny sense of resemblance that seems to emphasise the idea that the images should connect in some specific way. Rather than related 'jigsaw pieces', however, these are repeated images, more of the same fragment rather than a building block to something else. The key to this work, then, is not to be found in linear narrative but in a cyclic rhythm that is not bound by the traditional structure of storytelling. The circular installation of the work, which I shall discuss further in chapter three, and the repeated photographs of

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<sup>92</sup> Roni Horn in conversation with Lynne Cooke in Louise Nerli, Lynne Cooke and Thierry de Duve (eds), *Roni Horn* (Phaidon: London, 2003), 14.

which it is constructed, suggest a continuous stream in which identities come into being and change or disappear. On encountering the work, the viewer faces the disorienting task of trying to find a logic in the work, to locate a starting point and a direction of progression. Yet, such attempts are inevitably thwarted by the frieze-like structure of the installation that surrounds the viewer and reflects back on itself. This installation, then, is one that engages implicitly with the idea of androgyny as a site of mutability and possibility without directly addressing gender as its primary concern.

Placement and sequencing of images are also used as disruptive tools in *aka*, where the grouping of old photographs might otherwise too easily suggest a kind of visual essay depicting a life story. Rather than considering the artist in terms of an essentialised identity, whether that be as ‘artist’, as ‘woman’ or as ‘author’, we might instead think of her as inhabiting multiple identities which, at different times, reveal new insights into who she is and the concerns of her practice. As autobiographical project, then, the photographs of Horn in *aka* represent an identity that has not stood still, which has been and will continue to be remade.

Alluding to this mutability in their introduction to *Feminism and Autobiography: texts, theories, methods*, Tess Cosslett, Celia Lury and Penny Summerfield note that at least two voices or ‘selves’ are implicated in autobiography: ‘the then self, and the self now doing the writing.’<sup>93</sup> The suite of paired photographs in *aka* recall these past and present selves. Horn is present in the ‘now’ in which she orchestrated the *aka* series but also in the ‘pastness’ of the old photographs that record her passing years. Yet the seemingly random pairing of photographs do not allow the viewer to construct a neat chronological narrative in which Horn’s life might be tracked. Instead, Annette Kuhn contends that ‘memory [...] has its own modes of expression: these are characterised by the fragmentary, non-linear quality of moments recalled out of time.’<sup>94</sup> What I argue of these works then, is that the temporal spaces between each image can be understood as spaces in which memory is cognitively enacted, while the literal spaces between each image on the gallery wall are spaces where memory is enacted through the movement of the body and its passage through time.

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<sup>93</sup> Tess Cosslett, Celia Lury and Penny Summerfield, ‘Introduction’ in *Feminism and Autobiography: texts, theories, methods* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 8.

<sup>94</sup> Annette Kuhn, *Family Secrets: acts of memory and imagination* (London: Verso, 1995), 5, quoted in Cosslett, Lury and Summerfield, 8.



This passage of the body that is set in motion by Horn's photographs is, to use the words of Homi Bhabha, '[a] moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion [...]'.<sup>95</sup> Such spaces of transit, defined in the journey from one point to another, are marked by an in-between-ness that 'provide[s] the terrain for elaborating strategies of self.'<sup>96</sup> The notion of a space of transit was expressed in a much more literal way in 2005 when Horn's photographic suite *Portrait of an Image (Isabelle Huppert)* (2005) [fig. 1.28–1.29] was displayed in a stairwell of the Collection Lambert gallery in Avignon, France.<sup>97</sup> Composed of a series of tightly cropped portrait photographs, this time featuring the face of French actress Isabelle Huppert, the work consists of one hundred framed colour photographs, which are divided into twenty sequences of five images each. This work has been installed in a number of different ways, running around the perimeter of the gallery space as in her 2006 exhibition at Hauser & Wirth, Zurich, or, more recently, displayed in a kind of fragmented state where the image sequences interact with the architectural spaces of the museum in very specific ways.

In making this work, Huppert was asked to impersonate herself playing out the characters from a number of her previous screen roles. In this sense the photographs do not seek to represent an 'authentic' image of Huppert, but it is for this reason too that they are, I think, even more compelling as documents of identity. Horn is not simply presenting the viewer with a series of characters that each represent their own unique sense of self; it is not just a matter of identifying the individuals that Huppert impersonates. More specifically, these are images of Huppert acting; creating an identity that then seamlessly transforms into another and another with a tilt of the head, or a curl of her mouth. It is almost impossible to tell where her acting ends and Huppert begins (or vice versa). Identity becomes a slippery subject in this case, one in which difference and transformation is not only embraced but seen as an inevitability.

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<sup>95</sup> Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 2.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> This particular installation of *Portrait of an Image* was shown as part of the touring exhibition 'Roni Horn aka Roni Horn', Collection Lambert, Avignon, France, 2009.

The stairwell display of *Portrait of an Image* was one that heightened the sense of indeterminacy experienced in relation to the photographs. Bhabha has called the stairwell:

a liminal space, in-between the designations of identity, [that] becomes the process of symbolic interaction, the connective tissue that constructs the difference between upper and lower, black and white. The hither and thither of the stairwell, the temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities. The interstitial passage between fixed identification opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy.<sup>98</sup>

For viewers of these images, the stairwell installation is one that allows them to perform the same kind of movement between that Huppert enacts in the photographs. Climbing and descending the stairs as they move between gallery spaces, viewers are asked to pause in this non-place, a site in which they would not usually linger. The stairwell is not a place in which one would dwell in any meaningful way but it is precisely this kind of space, where one is neither here nor there, that is continually open to the possibility of something new, and reflects the notion of androgyny I have proposed in this chapter. As an architectural feature that the viewer must physically negotiate, the stairwell can be understood as a space in which the viewer performs the act of moving between, the same performance of in-between-ness that I have identified in Horn's *Pair Objects* and *aka*, for example.

Another installation of Horn's works at the Collection Lambert, Avignon, during the exhibition 'Roni Horn aka Roni Horn' provides a fitting example on which to end this chapter. An identical set of photographs from *aka* – a doubled image of the artist as a child – was displayed alongside Horn's *Asphere V* (1988/1993) sculpture [fig. 1.30]. This pairing of works produced twenty years apart makes clear the steadfastness and rigor with which Horn has pursued the theme of identity. It is also a lucid example of the way that Horn has engaged the idea of androgyny through media and practices that seem quite strikingly different. This is of course only to be expected. The idea of androgyny that Horn claims for her own identity is one that problematises any notion of fixity and this is also true of her art practice, which moves between formalist

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 5.

sculpture, photography, drawing and book-making, all the while engaging the performative. The strategies of doubling and repetition that I have discussed in this chapter are played out in both *Asphere* and *aka*. Horn always invites the viewer to look again, or to look between, to reassess what has been placed before them. Meaning comes from this performative act of looking, enacted through the physically repetitive task of moving between objects and/or images, but it also requires a cognitive shift, a kind of re-encoding of how to be and how to think. In the three chapters that follow I lead the reader on a journey through Horn's use of landscape as another device through which she explores identity as an in-between space. In each chapter the idea of identity as a process of becoming and as a performed activity remains central.

## Chapter Two

# On the Surface of Things

### An Androgynous Sublime

*This water exists in monolithic, indivisible continuity with all other waters. No water is separate from any other water. In the River Thames, in an arctic iceberg, in your drinking glass, in that drop of rain, on that frosty window pane, in your eyes and in every other microcosmic part of you, and me, all waters converge.*

– Roni Horn<sup>1</sup>

Whirling currents, murky depths, wind-blown chop and rippling, reflective surfaces; these watery characters are captured in Horn's photographs of the River Thames in London. Each closely-cropped image presents an intimate portrait of the river's surface, revealing the particular weather conditions at the moment the photograph was taken. These works speak of the mutable quality of water, its fluid ability to occupy all manner of spaces, its changing colour and texture, and its ability to suggest a variety of moods. In their depiction, the images give no sense of geography, offer no focal point and give little clue to scale. As such they are visually engulfing pictures. The cumulative effect of the images, each with its differently rendered body of water, is one that emphasises the impossibility of fixed identities.

In an approach that is typical of Horn, the Thames photographs have been presented in a number of different configurations. Like the water they represent, this series of photographs is chameleon-like, shifting from meandering wall-based installation to formal grid structure and book form. *Still Water (The River*

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<sup>1</sup> Roni Horn, *Still Water* (Santa Fe, New Mexico: SITE Santa Fe and Lannan Foundation, 2000), unpaginated, plate 7, footnote no. 24.

*Thames, for Example*) (1999) [fig. 2.1–2.6], for instance, is composed of fifteen lithographic prints, in which the seductive surfaces of the river are augmented by a series of footnotes printed at the bottom of each photograph that correspond to a superscript number discretely located somewhere on the image itself. The footnotes relate Horn's thoughts on the nature of water and the Thames in particular, as well as reciting poetic extracts, historical details and references to other texts that provide an oblique commentary on the liquid materiality and cultural significance of the river. In one particular image these notes also make reference to the acts of reading and looking they precipitate:<sup>2</sup>

**23** An old man was found in the river last Christmas Eve. He was wearing so many layers of clothes (including two wool coats and a jacket) police couldn't lift him out of the water. (They towed his body to a pier.)

**24** Are you paying attention to the numbers? Maybe you won't read all these footnotes. You'll probably get tired and walk away. (But there are more—more pictures, more footnotes: behind you or down the hall or in another room.)

**25** The opacity of the world dissipates in water.

**26** Black water cannot dissipate the opacity of the world.

The experience of viewing these works is one of slow and close contemplation brought about by the process of reading the footnotes. The very small text pulls the viewer forward to scrutinise the anecdotal evidence of the river's life that Horn has provided. In doing so, the viewer is brought face to face with the photographic surface and with the watery expanse of the river. This is an experience of landscape enacted in close proximity. Moving between image and text to read the multiple footnotes and examine the watery surface, the viewer must take time with the work. Each photograph is dense with potential meanings and associations, none of which can be garnered in a single glance. To look at the photographs is thus to pour oneself into them, to be absorbed by the surface both spatially and temporally. In some respects the viewing of this body of work is an overwhelming and exhausting act.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., plate 12, footnote nos 23–26.

In the previous chapter, I argued that Horn's investigations into the contingent nature of identity can be traced back to her own identification with androgyny and that one of the outcomes of this has been a fascination with exploring liminal, in-between spaces, both ideologically and physically. I identified doubling as one of the key strategies employed by Horn to stage this in-between state of the androgyne and thus, more broadly, to address the constructedness and mutability of all identities. Importantly, Horn's use of the double is grounded in a performativity that allows audiences of her work to experience the liminality of androgynous identity in an embodied way: literally to perform in the oscillating space of the in-between. By doing so, I have argued that her work functions as an example of the processes by which identities are constructed.

This chapter, like those that follow, expands on the performative nature of Horn's work, shifting focus to consider more specifically the way that landscape is implicated and deployed in her practice. I suggested in the introduction to this thesis that landscape, like identity, can be read as a performed site. From a phenomenological perspective, landscape does not refer simply to a pre-existing natural world that we might materially or discursively exert control over.<sup>3</sup> Instead, it is understood to be constituted through certain acts or practices where nature and culture intersect. As geographer John Wylie puts it, landscape is an 'ongoing process of relating and un-relating that come[s] before any separation of 'nature' and 'culture'.'<sup>4</sup> Performative actions such as walking, looking or building are, therefore, the very 'cause and origin of ideas of what is 'nature' and what is 'culture'.<sup>5</sup> These claims to performativity in landscape clearly resonate with the performative character of gender outlined in the opening chapter of this thesis. Neither landscape nor gender exist as discrete transcendental conditions, but rather are produced through our acting upon them. In Horn's work I therefore argue that landscape tropes are meaningfully employed as a metaphor for similarly thinking through the way that identity is performed.

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<sup>3</sup> John Wylie, *Landscape* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 11.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

In particular, this chapter is concerned with a number of Horn's works that invoke an experience of the sublime through an allusion to landscape imagery. The term 'sublime' occurs not infrequently in descriptions of the artist's practice, most often in regard to her photographs of the Icelandic landscape and the River Thames but these descriptions invariably neglect to pursue in any detail the question of how it is that these works bring sensations of the sublime into being, and indeed how the notion of sublime experience can be reconciled with Horn's larger project of critiquing identity construction. Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, for example, writes in an essay titled 'Kant's Ghost, Among Others' that Horn 'directly uses the language of the sublime but began after it had been wrested away from its once presumptive associations.'<sup>6</sup> His consideration of Horn ends here however, with no further analysis of how Horn uses this language of the sublime or for what purpose. This is not necessarily a failure of Gilbert-Rolfe's text – the focus of the article lies elsewhere – but his statement does however signal the sublime as an important, but I would say underdeveloped, theme in analyses of Horn's practice.

The particular mode of sublime experience that I suggest can be found in Horn's work in one sense mirrors androgyny as a form of masculine sublimation. Yet it is also one that I argue subtly suggests how the notion of the sublime might be used to come to terms with excess and alterity in a way that accommodates the other rather than dominates it. A point I want to make clear here is that while I propose the notion of androgyny as a kind of sublimation that *informs* much of her practice, I by no means wish to claim that Horn's work functions as a *representation* of an androgynous sublime. Rather, I suggest that her work stages encounters in which the viewer experiences the sublime as a kind of excess. Like the use of doubling and repetition described in chapter one as a device that prompts the viewer to perform Judith Butler's 'acts of repetition' and thus to consider the process of gender construction, I suggest that the works considered in this chapter are structured around a logic of the sublime that evokes a mutually respectful encounter with the 'other' in which a space where difference

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<sup>6</sup> Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, 'Kant's Ghost, Among Others' in Penny Florence and Nicola Foster (eds), *Differential Aesthetics: Art Practices, Philosophy and Feminist Understandings* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 114.

can be imagined is created. This opening up to and radicalising of difference is integral to the idea of androgyny at work in Horn's practice.

I gestured toward the notion of androgyny as a kind of sublime experience in chapter one when discussing Juergen Teller's photograph of Horn. In this image I identified a sense of discomfort that comes from not being able to ascribe easily a particular gender role to Horn: her physical body is clearly female while her body language is distinctly masculine. In his book *The Sublime*, Philip Shaw has suggested that 'whenever experience slips out of conventional understanding, whenever the power of an object or event is such that words fail and points of comparison disappear, *then*, we resort to the feeling of the sublime. As such, the sublime marks the limits of reason expressed together with a sense of what might lie beyond these limits'.<sup>7</sup> In Teller's photograph, Horn presents an image of gender in which the points of comparison of which Shaw speaks (in this case the idea of discrete male and female categories) are problematised to the point that they become redundant classifications, thus effectively disappearing. Pictured as both male and female, but at the same time never fully either, Horn presents an image of herself that does not conform to gender norms. The misrecognition that ensues, to use Butler's words, 'designates a gender uncertainty'.<sup>8</sup> 'What cannot be named or confirmed with satisfaction', she asserts, 'exceeds every apparently satisfying act of nomination.'<sup>9</sup> It is this excess that results in a crisis that recalls the experience of the sublime.

I begin by considering a number of formulations of the sublime, particularly as they relate to issues of gender and power. My starting point is the canonical writing of eighteenth-century thinkers Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant, whose texts continue to be critical reading in theoretical approaches to the sublime, and whose work is grounded in a fundamentally masculinist rationale. Notions of the sublime expressed by Burke and Kant were contemporaneously reflected in the art and literature of the Romantic Movement, in, for example, the

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<sup>7</sup> Philip Shaw, *The Sublime* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2006), 2.

<sup>8</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "sex"* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), 139–140.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.



painting of German artist Caspar David Friedrich. Although often deflecting questions concerning the Romantic in her practice, Horn's work, I suggest, openly invites associations with a Romantic sensibility.<sup>10</sup> Indeed this quality of her work saw it included in the group exhibition 'True North' at the Deutsche Guggenheim Museum, Berlin, in 2008; a show that, although not dealing exclusively with notions of the sublime, sought to make connections between Northern Romantic painting of the eighteenth century and its legacy in the photographic and video-based works of seven contemporary artists.<sup>11</sup> Horn's own personal engagement with landscape, in particular the landscape of Iceland, is also one, I think, that confirms the Romantic as an appropriate point of departure in considering her oeuvre. She has often spoken of the special relationship she has with Iceland, calling it a place in which she can 'find' or 'center' herself. In this sense, the artist expresses a psychological connection with the land that recalls the emotional depths of the Romantic and which, again, evokes a sensation of the sublime that is analogous to the experience of the androgynous other.

Such a reading of Horn's work, if left here however, would do nothing more than reiterate a masculine notion of the sublime in which androgyny is located as a strange other to the normative male/female gender binary. What I go on to consider in this chapter, then, is how Horn's works might operate as platforms for experiences that suggest a more disruptive model of the sublime. In this regard I turn to the work of Barbara Claire Freeman and Patricia Yaeger whose writing on the feminine sublime suggests an approach in which Horn's

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<sup>10</sup> In an interview for *Bomb* in 1989, for example, Horn responded to the question of a romantic ideal in her work with the slight concession that: 'My work certainly includes elements which might be understood as romantic. But the overall synthesis lies elsewhere.' Roni Horn in conversation with Mimi Thompson in Betsy Sussler (ed.), *Bomb: Speak Art! The Best of Bomb Magazine's Interviews with Artists* (New York: New Art Publications, 1997), 87. First published in *BOMB*, No. 28, Summer 1989.

<sup>11</sup> Curated by Jennifer Blessing, 'True North' was first shown at the Deutsche Guggenheim Museum, Berlin, in 2008. The exhibition included work by Stan Douglas, Olafur Eliasson, Elger Esser, Thomas Flechtner, Roni Horn, Armin Linke and Orit Raff. In the press preview for the exhibition, Blessing noted that much of the work in the show questioned the notion of a 'pure' or 'true' North, expressing a melancholic tone that gestures toward a sense of loss. For the artists represented, this loss, she suggested, is tied to the historical and political issues of colonisation and pollution. Horn was represented by the photo-installation *Pi* (1997–1998), a work that I will discuss in chapter 3 in relation to its horizon-like structure. See: Jennifer Blessing, 'True North: Press Preview', <http://vernissage.tv/blog/?s=roni+horn>, accessed 15 January 2010.

installations can be seen as staging encounters where viewers enter into a reciprocal dialogue with the 'other' that subverts the masculine dominance implicit within canonical theories of the sublime. This, I argue, allows Horn's works to be understood not simply as mimicking androgyny's supposed uncanny strangeness, but, more significantly, as staging experiences of the sublime that account for and encourage otherness thereby placing androgyny as but one type of identification within a stream of many.

An important strategy for achieving such experiences of the sublime in Horn's work is to be found in the tension between forms of visibility and embodiment. As I argued in chapter one, Horn's practice evinces a determined interest in choreographing bodily experiences that place 'viewers' in a performative role where they physically 'act out' in relation to the work. This is not accomplished at the expense of the visual aspects of her works however, the artist having continued to embrace the concerns of the visual field in much of her practice. What is of particular interest in the works under discussion in this chapter is the oscillation that takes place between abstract modes of picturing, characterised by an 'all-over' treatment of the image, and the embodied activity of the viewer in relation to them. Rather than positioning her work within a binary of being either embodied or purely optical, then, this chapter continues to tease out the in-between-ness of Horn's work.

## **The Romantic Sublime**

In his treatise *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1756), Burke argued that the sublime was to be found in the phenomena of the natural world and, in particular, relied on the sense of danger posed to the beholder by these phenomena. He writes that, '[w]hatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime'.<sup>12</sup> Such sources of terror, for Burke, included huge mountains and oceanic expanses that

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<sup>12</sup>Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 36.

induce a sense of bewilderment or disorientation in which the reasoning mind is consumed by sensations of astonishment and terror. These feelings of terror and immanent danger confront the self's sense of preservation and challenge the perceived ability to ensure one's own safety in the face of such sublime phenomena. The fear of death or harm thus becomes a motivating factor in this experience of the sublime. Fear takes over the mind so that rationality is lost in the disorientation of extreme emotion. However, although this fear is attendant to the possibility of death, death itself remains at a necessary distance. In order to experience the sublime, death must continuously be staved off or deferred; it must pose a threat but never be actualised. As Joanna Zylinska points out, 'even though death is the greatest threat in the sublime, it is the self's survival and the restoration of 'life and health' that provide the counter balance to the feeling of pain, and that complete the experience of sublimity.'<sup>13</sup>

One of the reasons that Burke's account attributes a sense of terror to the natural world is that the sublime phenomena that he locates within it are hidden. Burke thus writes of the 'obscurity' of the sublime as inducing a sense of dread because it conceals from us the degree to which we are faced with an actual threat. 'To make any thing very terrible' he writes, 'obscurity seems in general to be necessary. When we know the full extent of any danger, when we can accustom our eyes to it, a great deal of the apprehension vanishes.'<sup>14</sup> Indeed, Burke asserts that 'all general privation is great because they are all terrible: Vacuity, darkness, solitude, and silence.'<sup>15</sup> These incomprehensible phenomena are ultimately experienced as an empowering and elevating sublime when there is a suitable distance between subject and object that generates a feeling of safety.

Where Burke locates the sublime as a quality of the external natural world, Kant, in his *Critique of Judgment* (1790), more directly posits the sublime as residing in the mind's apprehension of the world. This is an important distinction to note as it evidences a move from the sublime understood as a pre-existing character of

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<sup>13</sup> Joanna Zylinska, *On Spiders, Cyborgs and Being Scared: The Feminine and the Sublime* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2001), 18.

<sup>14</sup> Burke, 54.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 65.

objects in the natural physical world to a sensation solely lodged within the realm of the rational mind. It is, in this sense, also a significant shift in which the role of the viewer becomes increasingly important to the way in which the sublime is understood. Kant writes that:

[...] true sublimity must be sought only in the mind of the judging person, not in the natural object the judging of which prompts this mental attunement. Indeed, who would want to call sublime such things as shapeless mountain masses piled on one another in wild disarray, with their pyramids of ice, or gloomy raging sea?<sup>16</sup>

Kant distinguishes between two forms of sublime experience; what he calls the mathematical sublime and the dynamic sublime. The mathematical sublime refers to experiences of vastness and overpowering scale, while the dynamic sublime is concerned with the perception of power or intensity. Both of these orders elicit emotional responses in the face of what appear to be overwhelming objects or events. These forces might take the form of 'bold, overhanging and, as it were, threatening rocks, thunderclouds piling up in the sky and moving about accompanied by lightening and thunderclaps, volcanoes with their destructive power [...] [or] the boundless ocean heaved up [...]' <sup>17</sup> However, the overwhelming sensations that Kant associates with the sublime need not only be of the order of nature. That is to say, while one may feel overcome in the face of imposing mountain peaks or vast and rugged wildernesses, so too one might sense the sublime in other kinds of objects or experiences such as huge buildings or, as I argue, the androgynous subject. In Kant's words then, '[a]ll we are entitled to say is that the object is suitable for exhibiting a sublimity that can be found in the mind.'<sup>18</sup>

While Burke's sublime is concerned with maintaining the self's safety in the face of awesome a priori forces that pose a potential threat, Kant focuses on the human mind's ability to master sublimity through its 'power of reason'. The sense of fear that, for Burke, is implicit in the experience of the sublime is, in

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<sup>16</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1987), 106.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 113.

Kant's terms, only one potential avenue by which the feeling of the sublime might be evoked. According to Kant, fear is not, as Paul Crowther has stated, 'the causal theory which enables Burke to construe modified terror and pain and (thereby) a link with self-preservation as the sublime's definitive feature.'<sup>19</sup> Instead, the sensation of the sublime is one that emerges in the mind of the subject who is unable to imaginatively grasp unbounded magnitudes or overwhelming power, but who, in their ability to think or rationalise these unbounded, limitless phenomena reveals their 'superiority over nature'.<sup>20</sup> This experience of the sublime is one that Anne Mellor argues accomplishes a mastery over the power of nature through an 'act of transcendental contemplation' that 'successfully detaches itself from participation in the phenomenological world'.<sup>21</sup>

Friedrich's Romantic landscape paintings provide the quintessential visual analogy of Kant's argument. In *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog* (1818) [fig. 2.7], for example, a magnificent and vast landscape of rising mountaintops opens up before the onlooker. Friedrich's wanderer assumes a position above the landscape; the mountain-scape before him is 'awesome' in its scale but he is nonetheless able to dominate it. The protagonist's vantage point suggests a broad field of vision where, despite its impressive dimensions, the scene before him can be apprehended in almost a single glance. Standing heroically atop a rocky outcrop with the lines of the two flanking hillsides drawn toward his position, the image presents man as master of all he surveys. What Friedrich's painting depicts is not simply a landscape scene but the authority of the wanderer, the rational superiority of the human mind that allows him to exert a sense of control over the grandeur of nature that he is unable to imaginatively grasp.<sup>22</sup>

The *Still Water (The River Thames, for Example)* installation that I described in my opening paragraph to this chapter gestures toward a similar kind of

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<sup>19</sup> Paul Crowther, *The Kantian Sublime: From Morality to Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 14.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>21</sup> Anne K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 87.

<sup>22</sup> For further discussion of Friedrich in relation to the Kantian and Burkean sublime see: William Vaughn, *German Romantic Painting* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1980).

experience of the Romantic sublime, however these works are not easily delineated as expressing a strictly Burkean or Kantian account of the sublime. Horn invokes an idea of danger and fear that is mediated through distance, as well as engaging with notions of excess and intensity that are mastered by way of the rational mind. In *Still Water (The River Thames, for Example)* it is the experience of water itself, presented as a threatening and all-encompassing substance, that engenders the sublime encounter. Each image in this series is composed around the principle of limitless expanse, filled with the continuous surface of water that appears to extend beyond the frame. In his book *Representing Place: Landscape Painting and Maps*, Edward S. Casey suggests that 'water is the in-between of the elements of landscape.'<sup>23</sup> Speaking of a painting by nineteenth-century American artist Fitz Hugh Lane, Casey describes the way that water occupies spaces between other elements and objects within the frame of the image; separating stretches of shore in foreground and middle ground, encircling rock formations and separating sky from land as it reaches the horizon.<sup>24</sup> Water's ability to move through different tracks of land and to fill variable spaces in this way marks it out as a mutable medium capable of multiple personalities. Water always remains connected to all other waters, always circulating, ready to reform and become a new version of itself. Horn gestures to this liquid quality of water in her Thames works, stating in a footnote to one of the images: 'This water exists in monolithic, indivisible continuity with all other waters. No water is separate from any other water.'<sup>25</sup> This vastness is one that holds a potential threat for the viewer. With water we are always exposed to the risk of being submerged or consumed. Like the oceans of Andrei Tarkovsky's film *Solaris* (1972), these moveable tracts of liquid, capable of infinite configurations within and upon the land, seem to possess an intelligence that encroaches on the

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<sup>23</sup> Edward S. Casey, *Representing Place: Landscape Painting and Maps* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 35.

<sup>24</sup> Born in 1804, Fitz Hugh Lane (also known as Fitz Henry Lane) was associated with the Luminist Movement (1850–1875) and was well regarded as a painter of ships and coastal scenes. See: James Craig, *Fitz H. Lane: An Artist's Voyage Through Nineteenth-Century America* (Charleston: The History Press, 2006).

<sup>25</sup> Horn, *Still Water*, unpaginated, plate 7, footnote no. 24.

edges of our own space.<sup>26</sup> At once absolutely necessary to our existence, water is also mysterious, even dangerous.

In the West these mysterious and dangerous qualities of water have often been associated with the feminine. While water is important in terms of its life-giving qualities that link it to the maternal role of women, so too it has symbolically signified, from a masculine point of view, the perilous allure of women. Klaus Theweleit captures a sense of this sexualised female notion of water, observing that :

‘A river without end, enormous and wide, flows through the world’s literatures. Over and over again: the women-in-the-water; women as water, as a stormy, cavorting, cooing ocean, a raging stream, a waterfall; as a limitless body of water that ships pass through [...] women as the enticing (or perilous) deep, as a cup of bubbling body fluids; the vagina as wave, as foam, as dark place ringed with Pacific ridges’<sup>27</sup>

The imagery that Theweleit conjures is familiar material in the art and literature of the western canon, and these associations, that impart a sense of the female as a mystifying and threatening presence, are layered into our experience of Horn’s water laden photographs.

The discursive content of *Still Water (The River Thames, for Example)* and the related book project *Another Water* (2000) [figs. 2.8–2.9] also trade on the currency of danger and fear by documenting the menacing side of the river Thames.<sup>28</sup> Horn’s footnotes reference a range of sources from the lines of Charles Dickens’s novel *Our Mutual Friend* (1865) to Hank Williams’s lyrics to the song ‘Long Gone Lonesome Blues’ (1950) and Stanley Kubrick’s *A Clockwork Orange* (1971). As one reads through these melancholic notes other allusions to the river are called to mind: Nick Cave’s 2001 song ‘Grief Came Riding’ in which he

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<sup>26</sup> In the science fiction film *Solaris* (originally published as a book by Stanislaw Lem in 1961), scientists sent to a space station orbiting an alien water-covered planet are faced with a world in which the oceans bear a consciousness and intelligence. These oceans are pictured by Tarkovsky as swirling, constantly changing masses of water that act as a mirror reflecting back the inner psychological and spiritual concerns of those who come into contact with it. See: Andrei Tarkovsky (dir.), *Solaris* (1972).

<sup>27</sup> Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies, Vol. 1: Women, Floods, Bodies, History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 283–284.

<sup>28</sup> Roni Horn, *Another Water* (Zürich: Scalo, 2000).

contemplates drowning himself in the filthy waters of the Thames or David Cronenberg's 2007 film *Eastern Promises*, in which the river features as a mechanism of disposal for dead bodies, for example. In *Another Water* the same annotated pictures are compiled along with a series of Thames suicide accounts gathered from policemen and other individuals working on the river. All of this textual information works to heighten the sense of foreboding experienced by the viewer in their close-up encounter with the photographs. Horn's work acknowledges the river both as the central artery of London and its boroughs, and as a site of death and sinister dealings.

Like Burke, then, Horn attaches a certain amount of fear to aspects of the natural world. Water poses a potential danger; there is a risk inherent in our dealings with it. This fear, however, is also one that is culturally determined. Much of the danger that Horn associates with the Thames is not do with the river's natural features but the way that it has been used and subsequently coded within human culture. The melancholy and unsavoury life of the river remains largely hidden, occurring in the dark and beneath the veneer of 'normal' life so that they exist more as a mythology than a matter of fact. This marks a point of difference with Burke who argued that the sense of fear associated with his idea of the sublime was induced by phenomena of the natural world. What Horn's work does share in common with Burke's conception of the sublime, however, is a fear of the unknown, of what can't be seen. For Burke, darkness represents an unknown force that holds the potential for harm or even death. Anxiety or a feeling of apprehension at the dark or the hidden is clearly an emotional response that Horn herself associates with experiences of the unknown. In a piece of text composed as a tribute to Donald Judd after his death in 1994, Horn describes the experience of open space in the desert landscape of Texas in terms of the same sense of unknown vastness [fig. 2.10].<sup>29</sup> She writes:

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<sup>29</sup> Horn's work forms part of the Chinati Foundation collection at Judd's Marfa complex, which is located in the desert region of West Texas. Judd moved to Marfa in 1971 buying up a number of buildings in which to permanently install his works. Judd chose the particular landscape of Marfa, with its arid, empty plains, as an ideal situation in which to display his own minimalist sculptures and other in his collection. Horn had visited Judd a number of times at Marfa before his death.



A week ago I was driving through a Texas night – and I found myself peering, relentlessly, into Texas.

Texas darkness is deep. It exceeds the visible. It exceeds the measurable. It presents things perceptible only on the scale of Texas or bigger.

And while I was contemplating the properties of Texas darkness, I began to muse on Donald Judd. Judd – the place; Judd – the geology; Judd – the darkness; Judd – the dust.

Texas dust is big and ubiquitous. It's complex and delicate too. When I walk upon it, as I am bound to do, I hear the strangely distant and loud grinding of the dust under my leather soles. Each step makes a sound that inhabits the darkness – an echo without repetition or end.

Ditto to the dust and darkness is Texas desert – big, ubiquitous, deep, and immeasurable.

Texas desert is quiet and open and relentless. Relentless in Texas is nothing other than relentless. Because Texas goes on and on and on. Relentless here is definitive.

Here is Texas darkness, Texas dust, Texas desert. Together they bring me to Donald Judd. Not the darkness, not the dust, and not the desert--but the depth, immeasurable – the relentlessness, immeasurable--and the ubiquity, equally so.<sup>30</sup>

This desert space is one that shares the same sense of expanse that can be found in *Still Water (The River Thames, for Example)*. Extending out like the open empty space of the desert, the water of London's great river fulfills its potential to occupy all manner of spaces, completely filling the frame of the image. What is ultimately, in the scale of the river, only a small detail, becomes an engulfing surface that consumes the visual space of the image. Horn's photographs give no clue to the depths of the water they depict, or how far it stretches. Drawn close to the surface by the footnote script that beckons to be read, the viewer is faced with the possibility of being swallowed up, even drowned by a substance that has overtaken their field of vision. In a Kantian sense, the ostensibly limitless body of water suggested by each photograph is experienced as an unbounded quantity that necessarily exceeds the imaginative faculties of the viewer.

This sense of expanse is intensified in a particularly compelling installation of these works in Turin, Italy. *Still Water (The River Thames, for Example)* was presented in 2000 at the contemporary art museum Castello di Rivoli against a backdrop of aged walls and peeling paint in a restored baroque seventeenth-century castle. In one room,

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<sup>30</sup> Roni Horn in Donald Judd, 'Some Aspects of Color in General and Red and Black in Particular. (artist Donald Judd's personal theory of art)', *Artforum International*, Vol. 32, No. 10, Summer 1994, 77.

photographs were displayed on a roughly textured blue wall whose surface mirrored the abstract ‘all-over’ effect of Horn’s photographs [fig. 2.11]. The watery expanse of Horn’s image seemed to spill out into the environment of the viewer, exaggerating the experience of facing and being absorbed into a limitless substance.

Another layer of disorientation is manifest in these works through the abundance of information provided in the extensive footnotes to each image. The superscript numbers that relate to each footnote are randomly scattered across the surface of the image: consecutive numbers can be found at opposite sides of the images, while small clusters sometimes focus around an eddy as if mimicking the currents of the water. Ultimately, though, there is no organised structure and the viewer is required to scrutinise the picture in order to find the superscript numbers that correspond to the footnote text below. In doing so, the viewer’s eyes move around the image in unpredictable ways, darting back and forth. The pace of this movement seems to change when looking at different photographs. Where the water is murkier and the surface more disturbed, the numbers are more difficult to locate. Scanning of these pictures becomes a more intent exercise, reflecting the chaotic activity of the water. The more stilled images, where the superscript is more easily discernable, slow down the act of looking. Either way, however, there is a sense of being lost or of visually wandering through an unmapped space.

Most readers would be familiar with footnotes as a literary device used by authors to acknowledge sources or append supplementary information. They function in a linear manner where the numerical sequencing suggests a certain direction, flowing through the text, following its narrative. This logic is confounded in *Still Water (The River Thames, for Example)*. The numbers within the images refuse any sense of order. Rather than being neatly arranged in a cogent and identifiable structure, they hover over the image like a kind of unfinished join-the-dots puzzle or a set of mysterious co-ordinates. Yet, even these analogies are ones that seek a hidden logic where none is to be found. Connecting the dots does not reveal a secret image or an answer to the mystery of the water; nor, as coordinates, do the numbers lead us to anything other than the footnote texts below. The texts themselves also emphasise the feeling of

discontinuity and disorientation. They are often repetitive and circuitous in nature. One image, for example, cites the following:<sup>31</sup>

- 27 “I am the Thames! I am the Thames!”<sup>35</sup>
- 28 “You are the Thames! You are the Thames!”<sup>35</sup>
- 29 “We are the Thames?”<sup>35</sup>
- 30 “We are the Thames!”<sup>35</sup>
- 31 “The Thames is us!”<sup>35</sup>
- 32 “The Thames is us!”<sup>35</sup>
- 33 “The Thames in us?”<sup>35</sup>
- 34 “The Thames in us!” (Repeat footnotes 27 through 34.)
- 35 “See Kurt Weill?”

Reading these notes is a vertiginous experience in which the repetition of statements fluctuates between question and affirmation, undoing the certainty of their own proclamations as quickly as they are made. Adding to the sense of spiraling disorientation that this induces are the footnotes to the footnotes themselves. As can be seen in the group of references cited above, these additional references are internal to the footnoting system itself; there is no secondary set of notes. Footnotes 27 to 33 each direct us on to number 35 before we can return to the next reference in the sequence. Yet the question posed here, ‘See Kurt Weill?’, is not one that offers any sense of resolution or clarity to the initial note. Rather, it is an obscure annotation that adds a further layer of uncertainty, opening out to more potential meanings. Footnote 34, with the cyclic instruction ‘repeat footnotes 27 through 34’ in parenthesis, quite clearly reiterates the overwhelming sense of an endless unfolding of meaning that carries on without closure: an experience of limitlessness that reflects the open expanse of the water’s surface. This cross-referencing and multiplication also takes place in relation to the image where footnote numbers not only suggest further links within the text but repeatedly refer back to the same points within the photograph. For each superscript number found on the image, then, there may be multiple points of correspondence within the footnotes.

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<sup>31</sup> Horn, *Still Water*, plate 2, footnotes 27–35.

The 'all-over' surface and elaborate footnotes of the *Still Water (The River Thames, for Example)* photographs ultimately effect a series of disorienting procedures but, as Horn herself is aware, the viewer still remains in charge of their experience with the authority to direct their own encounter. While at once drawn toward and into the images, for example, the viewer always has the power to step backward, to move away and to look at other works. Horn indicates in one of the photograph's annotations noted earlier in this chapter that the viewer might neglect or refuse to read all of the footnotes, or they may get bored and turn away. By stepping away from the images the viewer is able to widen their field of vision. The photograph, rather than an overwhelming expanse, becomes a framed object that hangs on a wall. Where the required closeness of its observation necessitates an immersive engagement with the river's surface, the materiality of the bounded photograph suggests a contradictory sense of containment. The frame of the image provides an intellectual boundary that holds the liquid surface in place, limiting the extent to which the water is perceived as *actually* posing any risk.

The architectural features of the gallery – doors, architraves, etc – similarly function as points that anchor the viewer within 'real' space instead of the consuming space of the image. This is especially true of Horn's Turin exhibition, where the walls of the gallery seemed to allow the river water to extend out from its frame. Doorways, windows and dadoes operated as interruptions that effectively undid the imagined experience of being surrounded by water by punctuating that space with 'manmade' forms that signify 'man's' ability to create and control 'his' own environment. In this sense, Horn acknowledges the agency of the viewing subjects in a gesture allowing them to exercise control through maintaining distance. This distance is, for Burke, the mediating factor that allows the human body to feel safe in the face of fearful phenomena. However, in the context of *Still Water (The River Thames, for Example)*, distance must actually be created by the viewers themselves because the excessive surface of the images does not relent. The viewer's ability to actually enact this distance by stepping back or looking somewhere else is one in which, I think, the rational faculties of the beholder are also evident in a way that is consistent with Kant's sublime whereby reason prevails over the failure of the imagination: that is, in order to feel in command of the overwhelming material presented in the work, the

viewer, as rational agent, makes decisions that will directly effect a change in their situation.

A similar experience of the sublime operates in the exhibition catalogue *Still Water* which was produced to accompany an installation of *Still Water (The River Thames, for Example)* at SITE, Santa Fe, in 2000–2001. This volume adds another component to the cluster of works Horn has now produced from her Thames photographs. Containing the same set of fifteen photographs, *Still Water* is an over-sized publication with pages 51x37.5 cm in which the images are printed on the right hand side opposite a blank facing page. The scale of the book is slightly awkward. This is not the kind of book that one might leisurely read in bed or take on a journey: it is a publication that demands its own space. The size of the book is one that presents a challenge to the usually intimate experience of reading. It is difficult to hold, better suited to a tabletop, and the pages are cumbersome to turn. As an object, the enlarged book makes readers more acutely aware of their own physicality by disrupting their expectations and undermining past experiences of such a familiar thing.

The book's scale also allows an unobstructed experience of the photographs that is more akin to an encounter with the installation. Unlike *Another Water*, in which the images are laid out over double pages, the spine of the book does not disrupt the visual space of the pictures in *Still Water*. At their larger size, the images in *Still Water* are thus more visually absorbing than those in *Another Water*. Since the book requires direct contact from its readers it is never too far removed from their body, or their field of vision. To look through the book is therefore an experience in which the reader must remain uncomfortably close to the unwieldy object of the book as well as the full-bleed images that cover its pages.

A similar dynamic can be found in another of Horn's photographic suites, *Pooling – You* (1996–1997) [fig. 2.12–2.18]. This series of seven photo-lithographs depicts stormy, tumultuous water churning off the coast of Iceland. The sequence relates to Jules Verne's adventure story *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* (1864),

the tale of two explorers' expedition to find the earth's center through a secret entranceway at Snaeffelsjökull in Iceland. In Verne's tale the explorers, along with their Icelandic guide, travel down from Snaeffels into the Earth's inner chambers where they discover a subaltern world of prehistoric animals, vast oceans and a strange luminous atmosphere. *Pooling – You* is Horn's visualisation of this strange fictive territory. The seven photo-lithographs picture the maelstrom found at the Earth's centre, capturing the tone of Verne's text in which he writes:

By now the rain had formed a roaring cataract in front of that horizon toward which we were speeding madly. But before it could reach us the curtain of cloud was torn apart, the sea boiled, and a vast chemical reaction taking place in the upper regions brought electrical forces into play. Brilliant flashes of lightening mingled with the rolls of thunder, criss-crossing in the midst of the loud crashes [...] while the heaving waves looked like miniature volcanoes, each hillock containing an inner fire, each crest plumed with a flame.<sup>32</sup>

In some of the images the frothing crests of swirling water can be easily made out but in others the photographs have been magnified so that the whole visual field is reduced to an abstract rendering of colour and blurred form. The sequencing of the images, however, does not suggest a gradual zooming in, of getting closer and closer until the viewer is finally absorbed within the water. Rather, Horn's presentation of the images is a disruptive one that tries to subvert such a direct narrative. Through this mode of display she demonstrates a sense of overwhelming scale whilst also providing the tools with which to negotiate this experience.

In the installation of the *Pooling – You* suite at Matthew Marks Gallery, New York, in 1997, for example, the images were evenly hung at eye level around the white gallery walls [fig. 2.19–2.20]. The spaces between each of the photographs played an important role in interrupting the flow of images and drawing the viewer back to their physical grounding within the gallery. At 106 x 147 cm, the unframed photographs are just large enough that they cause the viewer to

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<sup>32</sup> Jules Verne, *A Journey to the Centre of the Earth*, trans. Robert Baldick (London: Puffin Books, 1994), 223–224.

continually shift in and out of the visual space of the image. Not large enough to create an absorptive environment themselves, nor so small that the edges of the photograph need always be in view, the *Pooling – You* works create a tension between the imagined space of the image and the actual space of the viewer.

These same images are also reproduced in volume five of *To Place* under the title *Verne's Journey* (1995) [fig. 2.21]. In this publication the *Pooling – You* photographs are the end point of a suite of images that begins with a shot of the glacier covering Verne's imaginary entrance to the center of the earth [fig. 2.22]. This picture is followed by a series of photographs that bring the viewer down into the landscape, facing the geological forms and landmasses that constitute the surface of Iceland [fig. 2.23–2.25], and from here we are finally thrust into the torrents that form *Pooling – You*. Here a narrative thread is more clearly evident. Through Horn's photographic images the viewer is taken on a journey from above the glacial ice, to the surface of the earth and then into its depths. Within each of these sequences, a particular style of photography is used to suggest the viewer's physical relationship to the landscape being represented. The first image of the glacier is an aerial photograph in which the sprawling ice is viewed directly from above, in a map-like format. There is an implicit distance in this way of picturing the land. The camera, and thus the viewer's eye, is suspended over the earth so that the land is reduced to a two-dimensional rendering that cannot be touched or walked in. This is also, I think, suggestive of the way that many journeys, and certainly that of Verne's protagonists, begin by consulting a map. The map provides a means of 'way-finding', sets of co-ordinates that allow individuals to navigate space and to maintain a sense of security by knowing exactly where they are in relation to other markers.

The vantage point of the following images, which bring the viewer into closer proximity with the surface landscape of the Earth, continue to hold a somewhat elevated position but the geological features of the landscape are more clearly evident. In one image [fig. 2.23] a large area of uninhabited land, covered only in low ground-cover vegetation, opens up toward the horizon where the sea beyond is just visible. Another picture is startling because of the bright green

grass that contrasts with the dark crevices of a rocky crag [fig. 2.24]. A lone figure, barely discernable in the right-hand foreground, provides a sense of scale. The landscape, comparatively, is vast. The large rocky outcrop feeds down into a valley, which, again, opens out into an unpopulated expanse. These are images that easily recall the landscapes of Friedrich's sublime in which man, in all his superior rationality, is able to not only come to terms with but to dominate nature. One might assume, in this sense then, that the lofty camera angle of Horn's photographs captures the same kind of view as the traveler in Friedrich's *Wanderer Above a Sea of Fog*. This viewing of the land from above, then travelling down to explore fissures in the land that hint at the tumultuous activity taking place below the surface of the earth is one that emphasises a vertical axis, one associated with the hierarchical and distinctly male concept of the sublime proposed by Kant.

In *Verne's Journey* the narrative format of the book similarly allows the viewer or reader to exercise an authority over the landscape depicted. The narrative sequence effectively frames the reader's experience so that the images are bound by a beginning, middle and end. Acting like a kind of map, the narrative leads the viewer on a journey through the landscape as they turn the pages of the book; moving from an all-encompassing view from above, then plunging down through mountains, plains and water into the very belly of the earth. While this is most definitely a dramatic journey, one which in many respects is unimaginable, the lucidly organised trajectory of the book with its clearly defined narrative direction diminishes fear of the unknown or of limitless space in which one might be consumed. In doing so, *Verne's Journey* mitigates the overwhelming sense of power and vastness that we see in the images.

## **Abstraction**

Iwona Blazwick has suggested that Horn's images of the Thames display an 'anti-pictorial emphasis on the materiality of water'.<sup>33</sup> I argue on the contrary that the

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<sup>33</sup> Iwona Blazwick, 'Another Water' in Beth Huseman (ed.), *Roni Horn aka Roni Horn: Subject Index* (London: Tate Publishing, 2009), 12.



photographs in this series, and *Verne's Journey*, whilst maintaining an interest in the material properties of the water they depict, in fact rely intimately on the pictorial surface of the images to generate meaning and to enact a particular kind of experience for the viewer. While an important aspect of the sublime in Horn's photographs lies in their imaginative potential to represent a substance in excess, it also relies on the sense of pictorial vastness encountered by the viewer in their engagement with the 'all-over' surface of the images. For this reason I now consider Horn's work within the context of an abstract sublime.

As I have already pointed out, the final set of images in *Verne's Journey* have also been reconfigured as the *Pooling – You* installation. These photographs represent a very different way of picturing the landscape to the others that form the book. Unlike the previous images, which all suggest a position of 'viewing' and framing the land from the outside, the moving volumes of water that conclude *Verne's Journey* provide a picture of the land – in fact the very substances of its making – from *within* its bounds. The detailed magnification that Horn employs in several of these works is particularly effective in creating a sense of absorption in, rather than a view of, the land. The abstraction that occurs means that viewers are no longer able to accurately place themselves in relation to the image in order to make sense of it, experiencing a sense of disorientation within the pictorial field.

The effect of zooming in on the photographic surface is one that was explored by Michelangelo Antonioni in his 1966 film *Blow Up* [fig. 2.26], a movie that is also cited by Horn in one of the *Still Water (The River Thames, for Example)* footnotes.<sup>34</sup> Believing he has witnessed a murder and inadvertently captured the event on film, Thomas, the photographer at the center of Antonioni's story, embarks on an almost obsessive process of enlarging his images in an attempt to discern further details and find the truth behind what he thinks he has seen. The inevitable problem with his project, of course, is that in magnifying the photographs detail is increasingly lost so that the photographic image becomes a

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<sup>34</sup> '22 Did you see *Blow Up*?<sup>23</sup> Do you remember the park scene? – and the rustling of the bushes in the wind? And the camera? – just watching – wandering over the clearing? The sound of the bushes was dark. The river reminds me of that sound.

23 A film directed by Michelangelo Antonioni in 1966 based on the short-story "Blow Up" by Julio Cortázar.' Horn, *Still Water*, plate 13, footnotes 22–23.

grainy surface of abstract forms and tones. Rather than revealing more, the representational image is obliterated. As he enlarges the pictures, what Antonioni's photographer finds in the frame is not a concrete, knowable truth but a disorienting slip into an enigmatic and limitless space. This discovery of infinite and unknowable depths beneath the veneer of photography's 'reality' is more disquieting than the murder Thomas has supposedly been privy to.

The implications of the photographic surface will be discussed later in this chapter but for the moment I want to consider *Pooling – You*, as well as *Still Water (The River Thames, for Example)* in relation to the field of painterly abstraction. Abstraction is a motif that Antonioni explores throughout *Blow Up*. Not only do Thomas's 'blown up' photographs take on the appearance of an abstract surface, but references to modernist abstract painting arise throughout the film. Indeed at one point a female character suggests that Thomas's enlarged photographs are beginning to look like the abstract paintings of his painter friend Bill. This interest in abstract art within Antonioni's cinema is one that developed in his attempts to find 'ways of expression that are absolutely free, as free as painting, as free as painting that has reached abstraction.'<sup>35</sup> The work of abstract expressionist painters such as Jackson Pollock and Barnett Newman particularly resonated with this 'explorations of the limits of human creativity and perception.'<sup>36</sup>

In his famous essay 'The Sublime is Now' of 1948, Newman outlined an approach to his own work that articulated his abstract painting in terms of the sublime, and it is a position that I want to take some time to unpack as a counterpoint to the way that abstraction functions within Horn's practice.<sup>37</sup> Newman rejected Kant's philosophy in this essay, turning instead to favour the work of Burke who he believed presented a more accurate understanding of the sublime's defining

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<sup>35</sup> Michelangelo Antonioni cited in W. Arrowsmith, *Antonioni: Poet of Images* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 2.

<sup>36</sup> Mathew Gandy, 'Landscapes of Deliquescence in Michelangelo Antonioni's "Red Desert"', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, New Series*, Vol. 28, No. 2, June 2003, 227.

<sup>37</sup> Barnett Newman, 'The Sublime is Now' in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (eds.), *Art in Theory, 1900 – 2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 581. Originally published in *Tiger's Eye*, Vol. 1, No. 6, December 1948, 51–53.

characteristics. His argument, in particular, focuses on the tensions between beauty and the sublime. According to Newman, Kant had failed to clearly distinguish between these two phenomena and it was only Burke, who emphasised beauty and the sublime as oppositional categories, that presented a viable model of the sublime. The beautiful was used by Burke to describe things that were 'smooth', 'delicate' and 'timid; quite different to the language of the sublime which was heavy with words such as 'rough', 'powerful' and 'dominant'. Smoothness, Burke asserted, is 'a quality so essential to beauty, that I do not now recollect any thing beautiful that is not smooth.'<sup>38</sup> Such objects of beauty were also of a social order:

I call beauty a social quality; for where men and women, and not only they, but when other animals give us a sense of joy and pleasure in beholding them ... they inspire us with sentiments of tenderness and affection toward their persons ...<sup>39</sup>

Carter Ratcliff notes that in positioning beauty as a product of the social realm, Burke associated it with communal taste, behaviours and hierarchies.<sup>40</sup> For Newman, this situated beauty as a form of oppression that, as a socially determined notion, posed a threat to his idea of individual autonomy.

Claiming that the practices of Western art – from Classical Greek sculpture to Renaissance and Romantic painting – were essentially all concerned with beauty, he rejected this canon. For Newman, the Romantic paintings of Friedrich, of Lane or of J. M. W. Turner, for example, were too concerned with subject matter which, no matter how impressive, could only impede a truly sublime experience. What Newman sought was a form of art that foregrounded the self. He advocated, to use Paul Crowther's words, 'a more authentic and positive sublimity grounded in man's spiritual transcendence towards the unknown'.<sup>41</sup> This ambition was certainly made clear in his use of titles such as *Vir, Heroicus, Sublimis* (1950–

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<sup>38</sup> Burke, 103.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>40</sup> Carter Ratcliff, 'The Sublime Was Then: The Art of Barnett Newman' in Bill Beckley (ed.), *Sticky Sublime* (New York: Allworth Press), 225.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 54.

1951) [fig. 2.27], meaning 'man, heroic, sublime'. Robert Rosenblum describes the painting thus:

In its all-embracing width (114.5 inches), Newman's *Vir, Heroicus Sublimis* puts us before a void as terrifying, if exhilarating, as the arctic emptiness of the tundra; and in its passionate reduction of pictorial means to a single hue (warm red) and a single kind of structural division (vertical) for some 144 square feet, it likewise achieves a simplicity as heroic and sublime as the protagonist of its title.<sup>42</sup>

Crowther rightly points out, however, that Newman's notion of the sublime is based on a misunderstanding of Kant.<sup>43</sup> Not only does Kant make a clear separation between beauty and the sublime in his discourse, his notion of the sublime is one that shares affinities with Newman's own convictions. Specifically, Newman's aspirations for 'separateness' and for 'making art out of our selves' find resonance in Kant's assertion that the sublime arises in a moment of self-comprehension when the individual is faced by overpowering phenomena.<sup>44</sup> Crowther further points out that Newman's concerns regarding the associative qualities of representational art – qualities which for Newman necessarily corresponded with beauty – echoed Kant's claims that the artwork is always encumbered by its relationship with nature and thus is not a site of the sublime.

It was through a form of abstraction, then, that Newman argued a profound sense of the sublime might be realised. He did not, however, consider all abstract painting to be a suitable conduit of such an experience. He clearly states in 'The Sublime is Now' that: 'modern art, caught without a sublime content, was incapable of creating a new sublime image, and unable to move away from the Renaissance imagery of figures and objects except by distortion or by denying it completely for an empty world of geometric formalisms [...].'<sup>45</sup> Here, Newman summarily dismisses the experimentations of modern art as unable to give form to the sublime even after leaving behind traditional forms of representation. In

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<sup>42</sup> Robert Rosenblum, 'The Abstract Sublime' in Simon Morely (ed.), *Sublime: Documents of Contemporary Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2010), 109. Originally published in *ARTnews*, Vol. 59, No. 10, February 1961, 38–41, 56–58.

<sup>43</sup> Paul Crowther, 'Barnett Newman and the Sublime', *The Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 1984, 53.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>45</sup> Newman, 581.

particular, he singles out geometric abstraction as a style that, although not invoking illusionism, continued to rely on a formal logic originating in nature.

Newman addressed this problem in his own practice by producing works that were of a large scale, rough in finish, and which activated a dynamic relation between figure and ground by incorporating what have come to be known as 'zips' within the abstract colour fields of his paintings. Again, Crowther provides an insightful analysis of how these properties operate within Newman's canvases. The zips, which are created by masking a vertical strip of the canvas and removing the tape at some point during the painting process, act as a mark that 'declares' the space of the colour field. Without the zip, Newman believed that the colour field would be apprehended as a pictorial one, bound by the limits of the canvas, and therefore experienced as an aesthetic object.<sup>46</sup> In activating the open space of the colour field, the zip sets up an opposition by which the limitless and vast is established in contrast to the rationality of man. Vice versa, the finitude of the rational mind is only properly determined in its opposition to the infinite and the unknown.<sup>47</sup>

Horn's works *Still Water (The River Thames, for Example)* and *Pooling-You* occupy a complex position in relation to this detailing of an abstract sublime, in large part due to the photographic nature of the installations. Despite engaging with the pictorial conventions of modernist abstraction, both series maintain a connection to the representational world. The *Still Water* images are recognizable as water; light catches the ripples and currents, in some pictures slight reflections of objects such as trees are visible, and in others a leaf or some floating froth can be discerned. The superscript numbers that are smattered over the surface of the photographs function as a similarly identifiable feature which gesture outward toward another layer of meanings. In the *Pooling-You* suite, the abstraction of the photographs takes place as a gradual narrowing of focus that progressively distorts and conceals the image. While three of the images in this sequence take on the appearance of completely abstract surfaces, simply a field

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<sup>46</sup> Crowther, 55.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 56.

of swirling grainy colour, the remaining photographs are still inscribed with perceptible images of water.

In Newman's terms, these representational elements work against the power of the sublime. So too, following Newman, the completely abstract pictures within the *Pooling-You* suite, without any kind of figure to activate them, exist simply as aesthetic objects unable to generate a sublime feeling. It is my argument, however, that the sublime experience of these works is not one stimulated purely by the qualities of the images themselves. Rather I see the sublime as a performative effect of the viewer's embodied participation in the act of looking. In moving toward this claim it is important to examine in more detail how the figure/ground relationship operates in *Pooling-You* and the Thames photographs.

In both of these installations a tension is played out between the image of the photographic referent and the abstraction of the pictorial field; a tension that complicates the relationship between figure and ground in the images. As I have already suggested, the details of reflection and floating objects upon the surface of the water in *Still Water (The River Thames, for Example)* act as figures against the expanse of water that covers the background. However, I have also noted the way in which viewers are pulled into the images as they try to read the attached footnotes. When viewed this closely, details become blurred and are difficult to identify. The viewer's field of vision is taken up by only a fraction of the image so that scale is skewed and the textures of paper and ink become more apparent. Indeed, this marks the same kind of disintegration of the photograph that we see in *Blow Up*, where the photographer not only repeatedly enlarges his photos in a failed attempt to try and see more but also attempts to examine the images by holding them close and viewing them through a magnifying glass [fig. 2.28]. In terms of the viewer's ability to 'make sense' of the visual field, the experience of the *Still Water (The River Thames, for Example)* images is therefore much less like looking at a photograph and more akin to looking at an abstract painting. Conversely, the abstract pictures in *Pooling-You* tend to push the viewer away in an attempt to refocus and 'find' the image. Rather than being absorbed into the

surface at close-quarters, the viewer is able to perceive the other photographs in the sequence hung nearby (or in the case of *Verne's Journey*, laid out over sequential pages). As such, the abstract images remain connected to the water that can be seen bubbling and gushing in the companion pieces; rather than standing alone as abstractions they become implicated as a fragment of a larger picture 'of something'.

Thomas McEvilley has observed that in twentieth-century abstract painting the ground became the subject matter of painting and that when this ground took over the picture from the figure, the abstract sublime came into being.<sup>48</sup> If then, as McEvilley writes, 'the abstract sublime [...] involves cultic celebration of the disappearance of the figure, the end of the world', we can make sense of Horn's installations, in terms of their engagement with abstraction, as a return of the figure back into the world.<sup>49</sup> Although engaging with a modernist tradition heavily entrenched in pictorial concerns, her works function in dialogue with the viewer who encounters and activates them as an embodied subject.

A particularly vivid example of this embodied encounter is that of the viewer brought face to face with the images in *Still Water (The River Thames, for Example)*. The close viewing of the images that Horn prompts here shares affinities with the way that Newman believed his paintings should be looked at. The well-known photograph of the artist and an unknown female viewer standing in front of his large painting *Cathedra* (1951) [fig. 2.29] captures the same kind of close act of viewing that I have described in the encounter with *Still Water (The River Thames, for Example)*. Indeed in a piece of text attached to the wall of Newman's 1951 exhibition at Betty Parsons, New York, he proclaimed that 'there is a tendency to look at large pictures from a distance. The large pictures in this exhibition are intended to be seen from a short distance'.<sup>50</sup> What is more striking about this photograph, however, is the strong sense of verticality in which the body of the viewer in front of the canvas echoes the 'zip' that runs

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<sup>48</sup> Thomas McEvilley, *Sculpture in the Age of Doubt* (New York: Allworth Press, 1999), 25.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Barnett Newman quoted in Ann Temkin and Richard Schiff, *Barnett Newman* (New Haven Conn.: Philadelphia Museum of Art and Yale University Press, 2002), 41.

from top to bottom. The verticality that Newman privileges gives the work a particular orientation, as he says 'all my paintings have a top and bottom'.<sup>51</sup> In this way, his 'zip' paintings are implicitly hierarchical. Unlike the determined sense of direction in Newman's paintings, Horn's works invite the viewer on a journey through the unquantified space of her installations. The nature of the photographic surfaces and their mode of display prompt the viewer to move in relation to them in particular choreographed ways; an oscillation forward, backward and between. This represents a shifting relation between figure and ground that involves an ongoing process of perceptual differentiation and integration.

### **A Feminine Sublime**

This positioning of Horn's work as an embodied experience that unexpectedly disrupts and reformulates the experience of the sublime is one that I now want to examine further in relation to the 'feminine sublime.' The interpretations of Horn's work that I began this chapter with have accounted for the experience of overwhelming expanse, which might provoke a sense of fear, moderated by the implicit knowledge that through the power of the human mind we can confront and comprehend what are otherwise overwhelming phenomena. The problem remains, however, that an understanding of the sublime based on these ideals is fundamentally masculine, presupposing a sense of mastery and control, and the discovery of a transcendental self. Kant's privileging of the mind is one that, as Anne Mellor has asserted, ultimately removes the subject from the phenomenal world.<sup>52</sup> His notion of the sublime is one that suggests a feeling of our own sublimity as rational agents. This, I think, is what most importantly differentiates Horn's works from the Kantian sublime. Experienced as the triumph of the human mind over the forces of nature, the sublime, on Kant's terms, is an intellectual proposition. Horn's work on the contrary relies on phenomenal experience. The viewer's engagement with the photographic image is one that always takes place as a dialectical encounter with their own embodiment. Horn's

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Mellor, 87.



works, I argue, mimic the sublime's relation between imagination and the rational mind by orchestrating a situation in which the viewer literally vacillates between an imaginatively engulfing image and the rationality of 'real' space. While the modes of sublime feeling I have so far presented may indeed correspond to the uncanny experience of an encounter with androgyny – that is, from a socially dominant hetero-normative perspective – I argue that Horn's photographic installations, when considered in terms of their seriality and placement, gesture in another direction; one that opens up a space in which the androgynous sublime is expressed as the experience of difference and the in-between.

Within the field of feminist scholarship a number of significant writers, have developed re-readings of the sublime that have sought to reinscribe it within a discourse of the 'other'. Key amongst these are Barbara Claire Freeman and Patricia Yeager. However, before going on to address the work of these writers in more detail, I first briefly outline some of the claims made by Jean François Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition* (1984), whose notion of the postmodern sublime has been influential in providing a position from which to elaborate the feminine sublime and who, importantly for the purposes of my argument, also advocates performance as a critical aspect of this approach.

In contrast to Kant, Lyotard asserts the postmodern sublime as a model that reveals a contingent self caught in continual process. The postmodern world, one marked by horrific acts and suffering, and by reified capitalist systems, is one, he argues, that can no longer maintain the idea of the purity of a stable transcendent self. Postmodernism, he argues, 'denies itself the solace of good forms.'<sup>53</sup> Form, instead, is always contingent; the sublime always capable of disruption. It is in this sense that Lyotard sees the sublime as performative; creating new forms rather than discovering that which already exists. The sublime, for Lyotard, is

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<sup>53</sup> Jean François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 81.

therefore a heterogeneous concept that acknowledges its own limits and the impossibility of its own totality.<sup>54</sup>

Taking up Lyotard's notion of contingency, Freeman has posited what she calls the 'feminine sublime' as a way of rearticulating historically masculine discourses, thereby disrupting the opposition of male/female and opening the sublime as 'a site of border crossing in which meanings collide and transform one another.'<sup>55</sup> In *The Feminine Sublime*, therefore, she seeks not to re-assert gender-specific categories but rather to formulate an alternative position from which to re-consider dominant narratives of the sublime. Importantly, she points out that the feminine does not refer to a specific gender or class grouping but suggests a particular questioning of a discourse that 'perpetuates the material and psychological oppression of actual women.'<sup>56</sup>

At the core of Freeman's model is not the question of what the feminine sublime *is* but how it signifies.<sup>57</sup> In her analysis the sublime is no longer concerned with a desire for mastery and control but describes a crisis of representation experienced by a subject who 'enters into relation with an otherness – social, aesthetic, political, ethical, erotic – that is excessive and unrepresentable.'<sup>58</sup> Freeman suggests a relationship with the other that is based on an acknowledgment of excess in the world around us but that seeks to establish a connection with forms of otherness that need not be mastered or conceded to. For Freeman, the feminine sublime ultimately 'involves taking up a position of respect in response to an incalculable otherness'.<sup>59</sup>

Yaeger has argued for a female sublime that similarly foregrounds an intersubjective relation between self and other. Critiquing hierarchical models associated with masculine versions of the sublime, she posits what she calls the

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>55</sup> Barbara Claire Freeman, *The Feminine Sublime: Gender and Excess in Women's Fiction* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), 10.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 11.

'horizontal sublime' and the 'maternal sublime'.<sup>60</sup> The horizontal and the maternal are suggested by Yaeger as notions that refuse narratives of vertical domination, shifting out instead on a plane that levels experience and extends toward the 'other' in a field of multiplicities where the perceiving subject can 'become something other than a unified and transcendent subject.'<sup>61</sup> Rather than domesticating whatever may be the source of fear or excess, the feminine sublime that Yaeger outlines accepts these experiences and the subsequent dispersal of the self that this entails.

The feminine re-readings of the sublime by Freeman and Yaeger resonate with the way that the sublime operates in Horn's work. As I pointed out in chapter one, Horn's practice, in my view, is not concerned with reclaiming a female voice but is more importantly engaged in revealing the processes by which identities are formed. Like Freeman's investigation into *how* the sublime signifies, I see Horn's work as significant in exploring how androgyny, as an identity in excess that surpasses boundaries, might be experienced as sublime outside of patriarchal systems. Androgyny, as a concept concerned with revealing the potential for difference, is a problematic concept in terms of the Romantic sensibility of Kant's sublime. In the Burkean sense, androgyny can be seen as an object of fear whose strangeness is viewed from the safe distance of the heterosexual norm. Kantian interpretations of the sublime similarly negate the potential for difference and transformation by suppressing imagination, and thereby foreclose any possibility of conceiving of another order, one in which androgynous identities, for example, are not perceived as a strange othering but as one potential way of being among many. The performative aspect of Horn's work is key in this regard. Through its performative nature, Horn's work resists the grand narratives of the [masculine] sublime and is instead opened up to the potential for exchange with 'the other' that Freeman associates with the feminine sublime.

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<sup>60</sup> Patricia Yaeger, 'Towards a female sublime' in L. Kauffman (ed.), *Gender and Theory: Dialogues on Feminist Criticism* (Oxford and Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing, 1989), 202.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

Returning again to Horn's Thames works – images that I have already suggested appear to express qualities of the Romantic sublime – it becomes clear that the Kantian triumph of rationality over imagination that is played out, and which seems to reinforce a sense of transcendence, is in fact already subverted by the serial structure of the work. The sequence of photographs that make up the *Still Water (The River Thames, for Example)* suite exemplify the impossibility of singular, monolithic identities. Each image pictures ostensibly the same subject – the River Thames – but each displays a very different character: what is at first presented as a singular sameness is ultimately grounded in difference. This difference, I argue, is inscribed in each image through its relation to the other images in the series.

In 2000 Horn produced another version of the *Still Water* installation under the title *Some Thames*. Based on the same series of photographs, *Some Thames* increased to include eighty images of the River Thames, however in this subsequent suite no footnotes are appended so that the images exist as pure surface without the extra layers of meaning associated with the text [fig. 2.30]. A permanent installation of *Some Thames* at Iceland's Aykureyri University foregrounds the relational character of the work [2.31]. The photographs are displayed throughout the public areas of the university buildings, echoing the meandering, flowing nature of the river, while also referencing the movements of students as they pass through and between different spaces. The installation is significant in the sense that it negotiates the framed, and thus bound, nature of the photographic image so that the series spills out through the architectural space of the university in which it is housed. Viewers of the works come upon images one after another as they move around the university complex. When one photograph is viewed, another can always be seen in a nearby space so that the sequence of images, much like the water itself, always remains connected but is never experienced as a totality with a singular identity. In this way, encounters with the work are always conditional and open to change.

The individual images of *Some Thames*, each of which is different to the next, represent forms of otherness: they are other to the viewer but also other to the

further seventy nine photographs in the series. In their encounters with these images, viewers necessarily recognise the difference that marks each of them. There is an implicit acknowledgement that although all of the photographs are of ostensibly the same subject, the River Thames, they nonetheless deny a cohesive identity, coming together only as a collection of unique elements that do not add up to more than the sum of their parts. In a 1984 essay Yve-Alain Bois described Richard Serra's sculpture *Clara-Clara* (1983) as a work that stitches together a series of discontinuous views of the landscape.<sup>62</sup> I bring in Bois's comments here as the notion of a perceptual suturing together of images is one that finds ready correspondence in *Some Thames*. The multiple images that compose the installation themselves suggest a series of discontinuous views. Spread throughout the university complex, there is no one correct way in which to view the photographs, no definitive sequence or complete narrative. The viewers, in their various journeys around the buildings, construct their own personal narratives in relation to the photographs that are always open to revision. In this sense, the viewer can only ever hold a tenuous grasp on the work as every different set of movements through the University will result in a different set of encounters with the images. It is impossible to apprehend or even conceive of the work as a whole. The experience of coincidental, random encounters with images is one that emphasises the sense of the installation as incalculable and limitlessly unfolding. As such the viewer can never claim to fully 'know' it. To use Freeman's phrasing, this places the viewer in a position of respect toward rather than power over the other.

I see the idea of difference that is so clearly at stake in *Some Thames*, and which is played out as a reciprocal exchange between the viewer's experience of the water-filled photographs and the spaces in which they encounter them, as also mirrored in the relation between viewers and their colleagues, fellow students or strangers as they pass in navigating their way around the university. Like the multiple watery surfaces of the River Thames that Horn's photographs record, the streams of people who move around the campus also represent a multitude

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<sup>62</sup> Yve-Alain Bois, 'A Picturesque Stroll Around *Clara-Clara*' trans. John Shepley, *October*, Vol. 29, Summer 1984, 32–62.

of unique yet mutable identities. The viewer who takes in one or perhaps many of Horn's images also comes into close proximity with other viewers, each plotting their own course through the work. These overlapping and intersecting movements of multiple viewers are ones that, metaphorically at least, send out new ripples and generate their own currents. In Freeman's terms, these encounters, set in motion by the excess implicit to the structure of the installation itself (an excess that can be attributed to the sublime), are ones in which viewers perform a potentially transformative opening out to the 'other', offering the potential to consider identities that are located outside of, or in-between, binaries such as male/female, gay/straight or black/white, for example. Therefore, the sublime experience of these works in their installation format through the university buildings is, I argue, not predicated on a failure of imagination as Kant would have it. Rather, it is the acceptance of excess and the 'other' – in this case represented by the multiple variations of water-filled surfaces and the community of viewers who encounter the images – that allows the possibility of difference to be imaginatively conceived.

In *Doubt by Water* (2003–2004) [fig. 2.32–2.33] Horn produced another photo-installation that responded to the architectural space in which it was to be exhibited. This work is particularly interesting in that the photographic objects are presented on a series of stanchions placed on the gallery floor like pieces of sculpture, rather than hung on the wall. The photographs are double-sided so that as the viewer walks amongst the stanchions images can be seen from every angle. The stanchions are intended to be installed through a building, occupying all manner of spaces including those areas of transition such as foyers and hallways. This, of course, is very similar to the manner of display that was later to be used in the installation of *Portrait of an Image* at Collection Lambert, Avignon in 2005. As I noted in chapter one, such secondary spaces are ones usually only encountered in the movement from one place to another; they are not destinations or places of 'being' in themselves. As well as inhabiting these spaces of passage, Horn also groups the stanchions into clusters that coalesce, or

'pool' as Horn describes it, at certain points.<sup>63</sup> This placement of images recalls the *Some Thames* installation as it ran through the Aykureyri University, but *Doubt by Water* has its own unique rhythm. Pooling in a gallery space, then drifting off into a corridor before collecting again in another formation, the distribution of the stanchions suggests different speeds of movement – a kind of ebbing and flowing momentum – that results in different experiences of viewing. The amorphous and seemingly unstructured form of this installation trades on a kind of excess, occupying the gallery space in unexpected ways that surpass the usual rules of display. This same effect of excess is generated in the disorienting if not overwhelming experience of confronting multiple images of the same repeated photographs.

I have described the photographs of water in Horn's *Thames* works as engulfing pictures in which the viewer can become lost, but where a sense of orientation can yet be found in the frame of the image and the spaces between pictures. *Doubt by Water* offers an equally absorbing experience but it is one that is more emphatically three-dimensional. Spaced across the gallery floor and spilling out into other parts of the building, *Doubt by Water* inhabits space *with* the viewer pulling them through it in unrehearsed ways. Drawn into one of the 'pools' the viewer is able to improvise their movements in and around the concentrated series of stanchions and photographs. As is typical of Horn's work, there is no defined way of engaging with the individual components of the installation; there is no narrative, no correct order in which the viewer ought to view them. Instead, the experience is one of moving from one image to another in unpredictable ways, each viewer finding their own path.

The photographs themselves feature images from Iceland; stuffed animals, ice flows, water, and the cropped portrait of an adolescent boy. These photographs are repeated on multiple stanchions so that as the viewer comes upon them, connections are made to other images. Ultimately this provides one way through the work, but by choosing another image to pursue another path is revealed.

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<sup>63</sup> Roni Horn, Interview, Art 21, <http://www.art21.org/texts/roni-horn/interview-roni-horn-water>, accessed 15 April 2008.

These multiple criss-crossing pathways, like those imaginatively constructed in moving ones eyes around the *Still Water* images, present an excess of possibilities. This excess can be entertained as an invitation to move freely through the work, a liberation of the need to move directly from point a to b to c. It is also true, however, that this can have a disorienting effect in which viewers lose their bearings in relation to the work. One potential strategy for the viewer unsettled by such an experience is to try and follow one of the sets of identical images, using them as markers to guide them along. This becomes another way of path-making, but again it is only one amongst a number of other potential paths that the work makes possible. The performance of the viewer within the undefined space of *Doubt by Water* is one that I think engenders an experience of a feminine sublime by always entertaining the possibility of engaging with the 'other'. A sense of 'otherness' might be experienced by way of navigating through the installation in multiple different ways, continuously reconfiguring ones journey. So too, the form of *Doubt by Water* is one that allows the viewer to encounter other viewers/participants of the work as both try to find their way around the images. With no 'correct' way of moving around the images, the installation is a non-hierarchical one in which there is a levelling out of multiple experiences. This shifting to a horizontal plane of experience that continually unfolds in new directions allows otherness and difference to be conceived of in novel ways.

In Horn's practice the sublime is not a stable concept that reinforces the rational superiority of 'man' as it did in the Romantic sense, especially in the work of Burke and Kant. Instead the sublime operates for Horn as that which engages the viewer in a constant process of transferal and exchange and problematises the boundaries of gender categorisation. This is achieved not by directly addressing the issue of gender but by producing works in which the viewer participates in encounters with an excess. In the works discussed in this chapter, the excess of androgyny, understood as an unbounded gender typology, is doubled in the experience of landscape in excess. Through the cumulative effect of these experiences, the viewer of Horn's work becomes performatively engaged in a process of identification that is sensitive to the imaginative potential of



difference and of the other. Such an opening up of a space in which difference can be expressed allows the sublime to be experienced as a 'dispersal' of the self that might be endlessly reconfigured.

## Chapter Three

### Perspectives on the Horizon

#### Subjective Perception

*Since I first saw the Arctic Circle in geography class years ago, I was touched by how perfectly its entire existence coincided with that of the globe's. I knew the Circle was real, that it was no mere mapping device, since its synchronous relation to the earth was too unlikely.*

– Roni Horn<sup>1</sup>

In her Tate Modern retrospective, the photo-installation *You are the Weather* (1995–1996) [fig. 3.1–3.4], perhaps one of the artist's most well-known works, occupied the final room of the exhibition; a discrete space in which one hundred colour and black and white photographs, grouped into smaller sequences of between five and eight images, were spread around all four gallery walls. Each of the photographs in this installation features a tightly cropped portrait of a young Icelandic woman – Margrét Haraldsdóttir – submerged to her neck or shoulders in one of numerous outdoor hot springs that can be found scattered across Iceland. As a photo-installation, *You are the Weather* utilizes the space of the gallery in very specific ways. Hung at eye level, the photographs create a horizon-like effect that surrounds the viewer. The one hundred images are encountered en masse, as a multitude. The viewer is prevented from focusing on the photographs as individual images, or even images of an individual, and instead is required to read them as a whole. What I

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<sup>1</sup> Roni Horn, *Making Being Here Enough: Installations 1980–1995* (Basel: Kunsthalle Basel, 1995), 51.

mean by this is to suggest that it is not the image of Margrét that first meets our eyes, but rather the structure of the installation itself: the repetition of images, the alternating series of colour, and black and white, and the spaces between them.<sup>2</sup> There is a sense of rhythm and movement that is echoed by the body of the viewer as they turn and move through the gallery. As the viewer navigates their way around the installation, the image of Margrét comes into closer focus. The viewer begins to look more intently at her face, noticing her changing expressions; a slight smile, a creeping grimace or more contemplative gaze. The more time one spends with these photographs the more these shifts in mood become apparent. These changes are slight but they are magnified through repetition and accumulation.

For Horn, this is about activating the action of seeing. The structure of this installation provokes quite specific physical engagements with the viewer of the work. In an effort to apprehend the installation *as a whole* the viewer is pushed to the centre of the space, trying to take in as many of the images at once as possible. Of course, this is a futile gesture as the photographs of Margrét extend beyond the viewers's field of vision, pushing beyond the periphery to circle behind them in a continuous chain of images. The viewer is thus caught in a sequence of movements – turning, circling and shifting from centre to edge – moving backward and forward in an attempt to scrutinise individual pictures and make sense of the whole, then travelling around the circumference of the installation. With no real beginning or end, *You are the Weather* becomes a kind of immersive environment in which the viewer, or participant, must negotiate both visual and bodily experiences of the work.

In chapters one and two of this thesis, I placed androgyny as a key concern in Horn's structuring of the experiences her works stage. The installations on which I focus in this chapter continue to be grounded in an implicit understanding of androgyny as a liminal in-between space, however this is played out more obliquely as a series of gestures that explore the processes of orientation and disorientation, of being placed and displaced in relation to the horizon (itself a kind of in-between structure). In works such as *You are the Weather* and *Pi* [fig. 3.5–3.7] the placement

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<sup>2</sup> See also Thierry de Duve's description of this installation in 'You are the Weather', Louise Nerli, Lynne Cooke, Thierry de Duve, *Roni Horn* (London: Phaidon, 2000), 78.

of images to demarcate space and create a sense of immersion is one of the principal factors in determining the meaning of the work. Horn achieves this through the use of presentational strategies that draw on references to geographical and pictorial devices used to compose the landscape: specifically, horizons, circumferences and panoramas. These devices are appropriated by Horn as structures that we use to mark out space and determine our relative positions. What she does, then, is not only curate the images themselves but also the audience's physical and cognitive experience of the work.

In the Western landscape tradition the horizon has traditionally been employed as a formal structure used as a way of dividing space, drawing a line between earth and sky. Yet it does not, of course, represent the edge of the world in any real sense. In his essay *The Edge(s) of Landscape*, Edward Casey describes the horizon as 'an untraceable edge of the land itself: untraceable because it is not solid and continuous [...]'.<sup>3</sup> Rather, it is a relative phenomenon that exists as the boundary of our perception. As one moves through the landscape so too the horizon shifts, determining new boundaries along the way. In this sense, there is no singular horizon but multiple potential horizons that are taken up by a viewing subject as they move through space. To see such horizons within the landscape also requires being in a particular kind of location within that space. Not only is the horizon a boundary viewed from a distance, thus suggesting a particular special proximity, it also, as Didier Maleuvre remarks, 'assumes the presence of a perceiver dwelling *within* rather than above, the landscape.'<sup>4</sup> A view of the horizon, therefore, is one that is necessarily immanent, refusing the totalising view from on high, a point reiterated by Katrín Anna Lund and Karl Benediktsson who comment that 'the concept of the horizon, with its implication of movement and constantly shifting positions, takes landscape away from the often romantic and rather static association with place.'<sup>5</sup> Unlike such hierarchical views demonstrated, for example, by Friedrich's *Wanderer Above A Sea of Fog* that I briefly discussed in the previous chapter and Horn's own photographs of the Icelandic landscape found on the pages

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<sup>3</sup> Edward S. Casey, 'The Edges(s) of Landscape' in Jeff Malpas, *The Place of Landscape: Concepts, Contexts, Studies* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2011), 98.

<sup>4</sup> Didier Maleuvre, *The Horizon: A History of Our Infinite Longing* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011), xiii.

<sup>5</sup> Katrín Anna Lund and Karl Benediktsson, 'Introduction' in *Conversations with Landscape* (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2010), 8.

of her book *Verne's Journey*, viewing the horizon requires a position at approximately ground level. The horizon, therefore, must be understood as being apprehended in terms of visibility as well as embodiment.

In the installation *Pi*, as well as the book *Arctic Circles* (1998) [fig. 3.8–3.9], book VII of the *To Place* series, Horn presents a number of photographs depicting seascapes that are defined in terms of horizon lines that cut through them, separating sea and sky.<sup>6</sup> Taken from the Icelandic coast and looking North toward the geographic figure of the Arctic Circle, these images at once engage the horizon as a pictorial device and, more broadly, as a motif of perception. Although essentially a formless structure within the image, the horizon becomes the representational figure that allows the viewer to read the photograph *as* landscape (or seascape in this case). The horizon functions as a compositional tool with which to organise the components of the image and to anchor that image within the frame. In this sense the image of the horizon within the pictorial field is one that provides a point of focus and control that preserves the internal structure of the picture.

In many ways these photographs are unremarkable images that follow the rules of traditional picture making. The power of these conventions is, interestingly, made evident in relation to a similar set of photographs by Japanese artist Hiroshi Sugimoto. His ongoing series *Seascapes*, begun in 1980 and now numbering in the hundreds, employs a similar strategy of recording the structure of sky, horizon and sea [fig. 3.10]. In terms of their composition, these two bodies of work are almost indistinguishable. The images in Horn's Arctic circles and Sugimoto's *Seascapes* are each devoid of any other figurative detail, relying simply on the horizon lines that demarcate the visual space of the image, along with the textures of water and cloud, to identify them as landscapes. By following the prescribed rules of picture making, which are so heavily embedded within Western culture both Horn and Sugimoto point to the power of such conventions to define our way of perceiving and experiencing the world.

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<sup>6</sup> Roni Horn, *Arctic Circles* (Book VII of *To Place*) (Göttingen: Steidl, 1998).

Danish-Icelandic artist Olafur Eliasson has also taken the horizon line as a very literal subject in his work. His *Horizon Series* (2002) [fig. 11] is a gridded photographic installation of forty images of horizon lines that separate earth and sky. Each of the photographs takes a panoramic format, emphasising the outstretched line of the horizon and the tracts of land and sky that lie on either side of it. For Eliasson, these images represent an investigation into the disjunctures between the ‘real’ phenomenal world and pictorial representations of it, as well as considering how we as viewers experience both. These are concerns that resonate with Horn’s own practice which, as I have argued, operates for the viewer as experiences mediated by both visual and embodied encounters with images and objects.

A significant divergence in the approaches of Horn and Eliasson to these common interests is Eliasson’s decision not to exhibit his photographic works in conjunction with the installations that he is also well known for. Considering the photographs as sketches for his installations, he maintains a demarcation between these two aspects of his practice. Another experiment in dealing with the horizon, for example, moved away from photographic renditions to envision the horizon as an abstracted form that occupies the full circumference of a space. *Your Black Horizon* (2005) [fig. 12], was commissioned as an official project of the fifty-first Venice Biennale in June 2005. This project was a collaboration with architect David Adjaye who worked with Eliasson to design the space in which the installation was housed. Within this custom-designed pavillon, a dark windowless space, Eliasson’s horizon takes the form of a thin line of light that runs around the room at eye level. Over the course of several minutes the colour of the light changes, cycling through the colour spectrum. The experience of the horizon within this darkened and otherwise empty space is heightened by a sort of sensory deprivation whereby the lack of any other visual data that might distract the viewer means that attention is more acutely focused on the horizontal strip of light that surrounds them. Again like Horn’s work, this installation involves the viewer in a process of confronting their own perceptual awareness.

For Horn, however, there is no such separation of installation and photographic imagery. Instead, it is through the placement of photographs themselves that Horn constructs her installations. In doing so, there can be no separation between the

experience of pictures and space; both are encountered visually and spatially. Horn orchestrates embodied experiences through the placement of her images in what is in many ways a three-dimensionally orientated photographic practice.

The bisecting line of the horizon is so firmly encoded within the language of landscape imagery that even the most abstract of references – Eliasson's strip of light or Horn's frieze-like placement of images – calls to mind the forms of land and sea/land and sky butting against each other at the surface of the earth. In Horn's *Arctic Circle* photographs, even without the rippling effects of wind on the surface of the water or the wisps of cloud in the sky, the photographs could barely avoid being interpreted within the pictorial landscape tradition. In formal terms, the line that bisects the two parts of each photograph divides them into two equal sections. The vantage point and distance from which the photographs are taken means that it is very difficult to clearly discern perspectival depth within the images. The result is that the photographs appear to flatten out that sense of distance so that sea and sky are rendered as abstract blocks.

In this sense, Barnett Newman's abstract compositions can again help to elucidate what is at stake for Horn. As I discussed in chapter two, the abstract colour fields of Newman's paintings are activated as conduits of sublime experience by the addition of 'zip' forms. The space of the ground is declared in relation to the vertical zip that stands in metaphorically as the figure of 'man'. This vertical orientation is important in terms of Newman's overall project in that it stands as a figure of authority, one that indicates the power of the rational mind. It is also significant, however, in that Newman sought a way of adding a figure to his colour fields that would not be read as a representational element for this would be to aesthetise the work. A horizontal line in the composition is one that would too easily reference the conventions of landscape painting. Indeed, this was a difficulty encountered by Newman's contemporary Mark Rothko whose work, often structured around the principle of a central division between colour fields, is frequently interpreted in relation to

landscape. As Briony Fer puts it, despite Rothko's claims that 'there is no landscape in my work':<sup>7</sup>

[...] here we have Rothko reintroducing one of the main taboos that had haunted abstract painting from the outset: a line that runs across the picture as if it were a horizon line. Most abstract painting, including Rothko's own, had been predicated on the suppression of anything that could be seen as redolent of figuration in a landscape format.<sup>8</sup>

Yet, Violetta Waibel, for example, describes his work thus:

Certainly, an atmospherically rendered painting of William Turner connects itself much earlier and spontaneously to the imagining of a landscape than the horizontally structured colour expanses of Rothko's [...]. And yet in a longer viewing of his classical pictures, his suggestions of colour-fields urge themselves on us sometimes as a landscape.<sup>9</sup>

In Newman's work, however, the use of a vertical rather than horizontal 'zip' allows his paintings to be experienced very differently. The colour fields themselves become the horizon against which the figure of the zip is perceived. In chapter two I discussed this figure/ground dynamic in terms of the sublime but it can be further elaborated, in a phenomenological sense, as an enquiry into perception. Unlike many of Rothko's works, for example paintings such as *Untitled* (1955) [fig. 3.13], which remain enclosed within the frame by virtue of their horizontal division, Newman's paintings *become* the horizon or ground of experience. Rather than working with an image of the horizon within the bounds of the canvas, Newman's canvases actually become the horizon so that the viewer of the painting is absorbed into that space rather than viewing it as a discrete object.

This is an approach with which Horn's work shares sympathies. Our perceptual operations as embodied viewing subjects are key to the artist's aims in her horizon-like installations, which, like Newman, seek to engage the viewer within their own

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<sup>7</sup> Mark Rothko quoted in Anna C. Chave, *Mark Rothko: Subjects in Abstraction* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), 128–129.

<sup>8</sup> Briony Fer, 'Seeing in the Dark' in Achim Borchardt-Hume (ed.), *Rothko* (London: Tate Publishing, 2008), 42.

<sup>9</sup> Violetta L. Waibel, 'Horizon, Oscillation, Boundaries: A Philosophical Account of Mark Rothko's Art' in Joseph Parry (ed.), *Art and Phenomenology* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2009), 84.



space rather than within the frame of the image. This remains true of the ocean horizon photographs found in *Pi* and *Arctic Circles*. In a similar way to the Thames images, these photographs function spatially (whether as installation or book) in relation to the viewer and the other images in the series. Horn's use of the horizon, I therefore argue, is one that engages it as a conceptual paradigm to explore the subjective qualities of perception. Another aspect of the horizon photographs does indeed gesture toward this notion. While in some photographs the horizon cuts sharply through the composition, in others the shift from sea to sky is more subtle, hidden or partly obscured by mist. The simple fact that the horizon line can be so easily lost speaks to its existence as a non-tangible phenomenon. It also articulates a sense of perception as mutable and clearly dependent on environmental factors outside of the individual. Laid out next to a blank facing page, each of the horizon lines in the *Arctic Circles* book, as Mark Godfrey observes, is cut in half 'seemingly letting the photographic layout acknowledge the frustration of Horn's desire to see.'<sup>10</sup> In this sense, Horn's interest in the horizon form lies not only in its relation to the structures of landscape, but also in its use as a philosophical concept that attempts to account for the way in which our human modes of perception operate. It is to this discourse that I now turn. In particular, I am interested in discovering how perception functions as an interaction of visual and bodily interactions with the world. These insights will then be put to work in unpacking how Horn's use of the horizon format in her photo-installations function to question notions of identity and individual subjectivity.

### **Horizons of Perception**

The horizon is not a structure that belongs solely to our apprehension of the natural world. It is, as Casey explains, 'that peculiar part of the life-world that refuses to be an object.'<sup>11</sup> It is, in this sense, the necessary ground against which all objects come into being even after they 'disappear into its embrace'.<sup>12</sup> In key texts such as *The Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), 'Eye and Mind' (1961) and *The Invisible and the Visible* (1964), French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty developed a concept

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<sup>10</sup> Godfrey, 943.

<sup>11</sup> Casey, 'The Edges of Landscape', 98.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

of embodied perception in which the notion of the horizon is described as a vital component in our experiencing of the world. Importantly, he advanced the idea that subject and object are not separate entities but are reciprocally intertwined and interdependent.<sup>13</sup> Within this paradigm, the body gained renewed significance. Merleau-Ponty's work was heavily informed by accounts of perception but, crucially, he saw this perception as being located within the physicality of the body. In his own words, he argued that:

since the same body sees and touches, visible and tangible belong to the same world. It is a marvel too little noticed that every movement of my eyes – even more, every displacement of my body – has its place in the same visible universe that I itemize and explore with them, as conversely, every vision takes place somewhere in tactile space.<sup>14</sup>

According to Merleau-Ponty, the body is our point of interface with the world. He articulates a 'way of being' that challenges the privileging of pure vision as our way of apprehending and making sense of the world. As he describes it, the 'body is thus a way of saying that I can be seen as an object and that I try to see as a subject.'<sup>15</sup> For Merleau-Ponty, then, the world and our place in it cannot be understood in terms of the Cartesian split between mind and body. Instead, he posits that we can only ever experience the world through our bodily relation to it since our body is always already in the world. 'Our body', he claims, 'is not primarily *in* space: it is of it' and the rootedness in the material facticity of the world forms the basis of our perception.<sup>16</sup> An important point to make clear in this regard, however, is that Merleau-Ponty's idea of embodied perception does not simply relate to the impact of the external world on the body, but to its everyday lived experience. In this sense, perception occurs through our direct and active engagement with the world, not

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<sup>13</sup> The dates given in-text refer to those of the original French publications. For later English translations see: Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith, (New York: Humanities Press, 1962). Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'Eye and Mind', trans. Carlton Dallery in ed. James Edie, *The Primacy of Perception*, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1962). Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible, Followed by Working Notes*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968). Merleau-Ponty died in 1961. 'Eye and Mind' and *The Visible and the Invisible* were published posthumously.

<sup>14</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'The Intertwining – The Chiasm' in ed. Thomas Baldwin, *Maurice Merleau-Ponty: Basic Writings* (London: Routledge, 2004), 252.

<sup>15</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 167.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 171. Merleau-Ponty's emphasis.

simply in the passive receiving of worldly representation.<sup>17</sup> The ‘lived’ aspect of the body is one that implies continual change: just as the perceiving subject is always changing, so too perception must always be in a state of indeterminacy. Perception is always a function of the embodied subject’s position at any given time or place.

The horizon, for Merleau-Ponty, does not so much represent the end point, or limit, of our field of vision, but rather provides the backdrop or ground against which we perceive objects. Importantly, this means that the horizon itself is not an empirical object that is incorporated into our field of perception. On the contrary, it is the horizon that organizes that field. In this sense, the horizon is neither literally given, nor invisible. As A. Koschorke suggests, ‘it marks the border and the transition by means of which a totality of experiences is defined and simultaneously referred to its determinate negation, to the fact that it could potentially exist otherwise or not exist at all.’<sup>18</sup> To this extent, it is also possible, Merleau-Ponty claims, that for each individual, multiple overlapping horizons are in play, which, taken together, constitute our experience.<sup>19</sup> What this also means is that our own perceptual horizon may overlap with the horizons of others if they happen to include the same territory as our own.

The horizon does not allow objects to be fully possessed or determined. Although an object might be thought to have a complete identity of its own, one that is recognisable as such to everybody, it can never be fully known. Since the object only ever exists for us on the horizon of our own perception, it must always remain partial, revealed only in part. Every object that we perceive has other aspects or sides that are hidden. Those sides of the object that cannot be sensed become part of a background that exists as a non-sensory presence, a presence that the subject is able to cognitively reconstruct. This tension between what the body perceives and that which the mind cognitively reassembles is one that manifests as a perpetual play of immanence and transcendence. Steven Crowell notes that in the phenomenological sense a horizon has two defining characters: it is ‘holistic’ and

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<sup>17</sup> Eric Mathews, *Merleau-Ponty: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London and New York: Continuum Publishing, 2006), 35.

<sup>18</sup> A. Koschorke, *Die Geschichte des Horizonts. Grenze und Grenzüberschreitung in literarischen Landschaftsbildern* (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1990), 23. Cited in Jeff Malpas, *The Place of Landscape: Concepts, Contexts, Studies* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2011), 226.

<sup>19</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 171.

acts as an ‘interplay of determinacy and indeterminacy’.<sup>20</sup> He goes on to explain that what emerges within the horizon remains connected to it; the object of perception is necessarily constituted through its relation to the horizon. So too, the holistic nature of the horizon should allow that the perception of objects in the ‘now’ also looks ahead to how such objects ought to be perceived in future encounters. This procedure, however, is forestalled by the play of determinacy and indeterminacy. While certain objects may be perceived within the horizon, so too others must at the same time remain beyond perception and as Husserl writes these ‘indeterminate surroundings are infinite.’<sup>21</sup> The horizon is itself a structure that can never fully be determined. Our experiences must always therefore be contingent. Maleuvre sums up this implicit shifting of the horizon:

The horizon holds in tension the antimony of transcendence and immanence and gives a spatial image of their exquisite union *and* separation. Let either transcendence or immanence tip the balance to its own camp and the horizon vanishes. The horizon is just the forever-suspended eventuality that one might dominate the other.<sup>22</sup>

So far I have discussed the mode of bodily perception associated with the horizon as one concerned with spatiality but it is also one tied to a temporality. The present moment of any perceiving subject is caught between the past that it leaves behind and the future that it moves into. This too results in perception that is incomplete since there is, as Carol Bigwood puts it ‘more being beyond what I sense at this moment because my incarnate existence takes place within the indeterminate horizons of space and time’.<sup>23</sup>

I argue here that Horn’s photo-installations *You are the Weather* and *Pi* can be productively read in terms of Merleau-Ponty’s notion of the horizon. The configuration of each of these works, in which the viewer is surrounded by a linear row of photographs, enacts the structure of the horizon in a very literal way. In doing so, the installations each engage their audience in a performative situation where the viewer’s role as a perceiving subject is made explicit. The horizons that

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<sup>20</sup> Steven Crowell, ‘Phenomenology and Aesthetics; Or, Why Art Matters’ in Joseph Parry (ed.), *Art and Phenomenology* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2011), 36.

<sup>21</sup> Husserl cited in *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>22</sup> Maleuvre, 4.

<sup>23</sup> Carol Bigwood, ‘Renaturalizing the Body (With the Help of Merleau-Ponty)’, *Hypatia*, Vol. 6, No. 3, Autumn 1991, 65.

Horn fabricates function as a ground against which the viewers themselves become the figure. The viewer is plunged into the horizon, and thus into the work. As Merleau-Ponty puts it ‘he before whom the horizon opens is caught up, included within it’.<sup>24</sup> Both *Pi* and *You Are the Weather* draw the viewer into an immersive environment where the work can only be apprehended in fragments. In addition to being led round the edge of the exhibition space, spectators – or participants – of these photo-installations are also pushed toward the centre of the floor as they attempt to grasp the work in its entirety. Meaningful engagement with the work therefore only ever occurs from a ‘point of view’ within the visible. Merleau-Ponty recounts this point of view experience observing: ‘when I walk around my flat, the various aspects in which it presents itself to me could not possibly appear as views of one and the same thing if I did not know that each of them represents the flat seen from one spot or another, and if I were unaware of my movements, and of my body as retaining its identity through the stages of those movements.’<sup>25</sup> These ‘points of view’, like the overlapping horizons, work to build up an experience of Horn’s installation. As Merleau-Ponty points out, this is an embodied experience that relies on maintaining a dynamic relation between what we see and how our bodies move in space. Horn’s horizontal installations thus perform Merleau-Ponty’s notion of perception and embodiment through their very structure, and reinforce landscape, as cultural anthropologist Timothy Ingold has argued, ‘not [as] a totality that you or anyone else can look *at*, [but] rather the world *in* which we stand in taking up a point of view on our surroundings.’<sup>26</sup>

*Pi* involves the same horizontal presentation of images as *You are the Weather*, which I have already described. This work is an installation of forty-five colour and black and white photographs, which is installed in a fixed, continuous sequence on the four walls of a room, at a height of six feet. Seemingly disparate images of empty seascapes, taxidermied birds, lighthouses, portraits and stills from an American soap opera are brought together to create what Horn describes as ‘a

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<sup>24</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible, Followed by Working Notes*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 149.

<sup>25</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 203.

<sup>26</sup> T. Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*, (London: Routledge, 2000),

collection of circular and cyclical events'.<sup>27</sup> A number of the images are repeated or reversed so that there is a sense of echoing and the perpetuation of an eternal rhythm. Again, there is no prevailing narrative structure to the work, a point which it is perhaps more important to emphasise in this work given the temptation to elaborate some kind of descriptive account of Hildur and Björn and their Icelandic home. Rather, images must be read in connection to one another, and the space of their display. The placement of individual photographs sets up a dialogue between images, which moves backwards, forwards and across the gallery, simultaneously taking the gaze and the body of the viewer on a non-directional journey through and around the space. The height of the installation also functions to negate a narrative engagement with individual photographs. Unable to view single pictures at close proximity, the viewer is pushed back toward the centre of the space such that images only register in connection to those around them. Viewers of *Pi* are placed below the horizon line, entrenching them more emphatically in the space of the gallery.

This gesture of placing the viewer not simply in front of a work but inside it, and inside the 'real space' of the world, is one that performatively changes the terms on which the viewer encounters the work; it marks a reversal of sorts with Horn's sculptural work. The *Pair Objects* discussed in chapter one, for instance, are solid forms with a weight and volume that anchors them in space. The viewer walks around the objects, taking them in from different angles and then moving between the two parts of the separated pair, comparing the different pieces. In Merleau-Ponty's terms, the actions of viewers as they navigate their way around the works and the gallery space is one that brings multiple horizons into being. Each new view presents another version of the objects creating a series of perceptual links in which the viewer attempts to suture together a complete, no matter how impossible, picture of the thing before them. Similar attempts to reconcile the multiple horizons within which the objects appear are made by virtue of the 'memory game' that Horn sets up in placing the identical sculptures in different, or at least distanced, spaces. In attempting to confirm the perceived similarity of the duplicate objects the viewer becomes embroiled in a process of shifting from one perceptual horizon to another, carrying the residue of each encounter while looking for a match. Yet, such a

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<sup>27</sup> Roni Horn, 'Interview: Lynne Cooke in conversation with Roni Horn' in *Roni Horn*, 8.

convergence never takes place since the objects occupy their own distinct positions and exist in a unique and unrepeatable relation to that space.

As ostensibly self-contained forms, the *Pair Objects* establish a rather traditional subject-object dynamic with the viewer. The sculptural objects occupy a central position in relation to the viewer who circumnavigates the work from the periphery. Horn's horizontal photo-installations, on the other hand, place the viewer not on the edge looking in but in a central position where they are encircled by the work; like in the landscape, the beholder holds a view of the horizon from within. In many ways this inversion has the same effect. The viewer is unable to apprehend the installation in its entirety, instead having to take it experience it as fragments. The iteration of photographs in *You are the Weather*, which represent the same person but which detail small changes in her expressions and her surroundings (most obviously, for example, the amount of steam she is surrounded by), gesture toward a multiplicity of perspectives which represent not only the unfixed and changing identity of Margrét herself, but also the fragmented perceptual horizon of the viewer. In *Pi* a similar effect of fragmented perception is experienced in the encounter with repeated images that echo across and around the space of the installation. Rather than being able to 'construct' an identity for the work and the story it appears to tell, the doubled (or sometimes tripled) reproduction of pictures continually disrupts the flow of the supposed narrative, thereby continually breaking down the 'total' view into a series of perspectives that cannot be reconciled into a coherent unity.

This fragmentation again recalls the experience of discontinuous views that Yve-Alain Bois has described in relation to Richard Serra's *Clara-Clara* sculpture. In this essay, Bois cites Serra's comments on the experience of viewing his sculptures. He writes of *St John's Rotary Arc* (1975–80) that, in moving around the sculpture viewers 'cannot ascribe the multiplicity of views to a Gestalt reading of the Arc. Its form remains ambiguous, indeterminable, unknowable as an entity'.<sup>28</sup> The twelve-foot high curved steel structure, that sweeps around like a disconnected piece of a panoramic enclosure, can only be apprehended as a series of linked views pieced together by a body in motion as it moves around the work. This bodily engagement

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<sup>28</sup> Richard Serra quoted in Yve-Alain Bois, 'A Picturesque Stroll Around *Clara-Clara*' trans. John Shepley, *October*, Vol. 29, Summer 1984, 34.

with the viewer is one that echoes Horn's horizon installation, yet like the *Pair Objects*, maintains a dynamic whereby the viewer circles the sculpture still viewing it as an object to look out on, an experience that Horn reverses.

Thinking back to the way that Robert Smithson's land work *Spiral Jetty* (1970) had been photographed from above and was thus experienced by many simply as a flattened graphic rendering, Serra contends that the multiplicity of views privileged in his own work are compromised by aerial photography's panoptic view from on high. Serra's remarks about photography evidence not only his desire to produce works that offer embodied spatial experiences but also, as Bois notes, evidences 'the pictorial [as] one of the qualities that Serra would like to banish completely from his sculpture'.<sup>29</sup> While Horn's horizon installations share much in common with the embodied experiences engendered by Serra's sculptures, Horn's work can be distinguished in its clear embrace of the pictorial field of photography. Unlike Serra, and Eliasson whose work I have already mentioned, Horn does not oppose embodied encounters and pictorial forms of representation. Rather, she exploits photography as a familiar and accessible form of image-making, playing on and disrupting the viewer's assumptions about the medium. In the case of *You are the Weather* and *Pi*, the intense and potentially overwhelming embodied experience of being immersed within the installation is only realised through the viewer's engagement with the photographic images. Surrounded by the multiple photographs of Margrét who looks out over and over again from the photographic surface, *You are the Weather* initiates a series of gazes that entangle subject and object, viewer and viewed in a repeating reciprocal encounter.

### **Gendered Gaze**

In thinking further about *You are the Weather*, in particular, it is useful to consider the gendering of the gaze. While the notion of the horizon is one that necessitates an embodied relationship to the world, it is also true that this resonates as an embodied 'way of seeing'. I therefore want to consider the different modes of looking and being looked at that are set in motion by *You are the Weather* before going on to

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<sup>29</sup> Bois, 32.



consider how the physicality of the installation works to complicate those gazes. Judith Butler argues that perception is not a purely subjective process but is one mediated by social and political contexts.<sup>30</sup> Seeing is not neutral and involves a process of defining limits and making the visible intelligible. For Butler, the issue is a matter of *who* has the ability, or power, to determine what are legitimate perceptions. The question then becomes, how can new modes of perception be developed that account for multiple identities, such as different genders or ethnicities? Gail Weiss has noted that this problem has tended to be addressed in terms of how and if individual agency can be put to work to resist oppressive systems. For Weiss though, opposition to dominant ways of viewing the world should not be a matter of the individual pitted against society. In this regard she follows Linda Martín Alcoff, who posits that identity is an ‘interpretive horizon’, constituted through everyday experience, both individually and collectively.<sup>31</sup> Identity, Weiss argues then, ‘is never fixed once and for all but is continuously constructed and reconstructed out of past, present, and future intersubjective experiences.’<sup>32</sup>

It is in *You are the Weather* that the issue of gender seems to be most immediately of concern. The one hundred photographs of Margrét present images of a young, attractive woman pictured in a series of situations in which might be seen as alluring or vulnerable. Photographed bathing in hotpools, she is wet and bare faced, revealing her naked shoulders. In one sense, there is an undeniable erotic intensity attached to the images that seems to provoke the objectifying gaze of the beholder. In Laura Mulvey’s words, we can say that they are ‘coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness.’<sup>33</sup> Read in this way, *You are the Weather* presents a male world view; a horizon typically constituted by the ‘acts

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<sup>30</sup> Butler analyses this idea of ‘seeing’ in relation to the acquittal of four police officers on charges of beating a black man in 1991 despite video evidence of the incident. She suggests that the jury’s failure to ‘see’ the use of excessive force results from ‘the racist schema that orchestrates and interprets the event, which splits the violent intention off from the body who wields it and attributes it to the body who receives it.’ Judith Butler, ‘Endangered/Endangering: Schematic Racism and White Paranoia’ in Robert Gooding-Williams (ed.), *Reading Rodney King: Reading Urban Uprising* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 20.

<sup>31</sup> Linda Martín Alcoff quoted in Gail Weiss, *Refiguring the Ordinary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 4.

<sup>32</sup> Weiss, 4.

<sup>33</sup> Laura Mulvey, ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ (1975) in Constance Penley (ed.), *Feminism and Film Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), 62.

of repetition' that assert the dominance of male over female identity. The imaging of Margrét in the hotpools, in which, as I have said, she is wet and, for all we can tell, apparently naked, is a repetition and consolidation of traditionally male ways of viewing female bodies: the male is the desiring subject, the female is the object to be possessed.

Norman Bryson describes how the female body is eroticised in nineteenth-century French painting by disrupting the visual space of the image. He argues that 'perspective lines running through flooring, windows, tables, chairs, anchor the body in its own space outside the picture-plane; however erotic the image, the anchoring functions as erotic obstacle.'<sup>34</sup> By locating the body in an ambiguous pictorial space, through the use of amorphous substances such as water or steam, for example, Bryson suggests that the body is presented simply as posture, enacting the desire of the gaze and making the body sexually available.<sup>35</sup> The pictures of Margrét in *You Are the Weather* play out this desiring of the body in just the way Bryson describes. Surrounded by water and steam rising from the thermal pools, Margrét's is located in a similarly indeterminate body of water to that which threatened to submerge the viewer of the all-over surfaces I discussed in chapter two. The image of the young woman is thus not fixed within space, existing rather in an indeterminate pictorial field as an object of a desiring gaze.

Art historian Thierry de Duve describes his encounter with *You are the Weather* thus:

When I first came upon the installation *You Are the Weather*, I instantly fell in love with it. [...] Could I possibly have fallen in love with the woman in the pictures [...]? Critics are no more meant to fall in love with the figure in an image than artists with their model, though both have been known to happen.<sup>36</sup>

De Duve's comment, uttered as it is by a male viewer, is one that seems to evidence the desiring gaze of the male viewer: a way of seeing Horn's photographs of Margrét from the perspective of a masculine horizon. However, de Duve goes on to say that:

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<sup>34</sup> Norman Bryson, *Word and Image: French Painting of the Ancien Regime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 95.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Thierry de Duve, 'Focus: *You are the Weather*' in Louise Nerli, Lynne Cooke and Thierry de Duve. *Roni Horn* (London: Phaidon, 2000), 78.

Before I saw her at all, I saw the frieze, the repetition, the series, the intervals between the series, I saw a form. Or did I? [...] All I remember is that I knew on the spot that the relation I felt had to do with the certainty that the work's form was its content.<sup>37</sup>

This is a significant observation that points to the importance of Horn's chosen strategy of display in *You are the Weather* that problematises the act of viewing, and desiring, even as it mitigates it.

To make this point more clearly I think a brief comparison to the reception of Cindy Sherman's *Film Stills* is fruitful. In a characteristically parodic gesture, the *Film Stills* present a fashioning of female identity from the perspective of the male gaze. A particular criticism levelled against these works, however, has been that in their re-staging of the various roles imposed on the female body, they fail to offer an alternative picture of 'woman'.<sup>38</sup> Instead, the all too readily identifiable signifiers of female identity are rehearsed within the frame of the image thereby continuing to function within the realm of the male gaze, perpetuating the very stereotypes the artist seeks to undermine. The following comment by Peter Schjeldahl in response to the *Film Stills* attests to such concerns:

As a male, I also find these pictures sentimentally, charmingly, and sometimes pretty fiercely erotic: I'm in love again with every look at the insecure blonde in the night-time city. I am responding to Sherman's knack, shared with many movie actresses, of projecting feminine vulnerability, thereby triggering (masculine) urges to ravish and/or to protect. But it is the frame, with its exciting safety, that makes my response possible.<sup>39</sup>

Schjeldahl's remarks suggest that Sherman's parodies of female identity may indeed invite the male gaze and that the frame of the image is crucial in enabling this view. In other words, in her parodic stagings, Sherman creates a fictive world that gives the male gaze freedom to safely indulge in voyeuristic fantasies of the female. Linda

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> See for example: Mira Schor, *Wet: On Painting, Feminism, and Art Culture* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1999).

<sup>39</sup> Peter Schjeldahl quoted in Schor, 110.

Hutcheon notes this propensity as an inherent aspect of parody, writing that: '[...] parody always implicitly reinforces even as it ironically debunks [...].'<sup>40</sup>

Although clearly employing quite different representational tactics, both *You are the Weather* and the *Film Stills* have the potential to be read from a traditionally masculine point of view. However I argue that Horn's images, taken in the context of the full installation, in fact operate collectively to foreground the mechanisms of our perceptual frameworks and are thus quite clearly engage in an altogether different project. Hutcheon has suggested that artists such as Sherman employ 'strategies of parodic inscription and subversion in order to initiate the deconstructive first step' but, she argues, these strategies ultimately do not offer the tools required for radical reconstruction.<sup>41</sup> The multiple images of Margrét in *You are the Weather* presents a more ambiguous idea of identity than the slick finish of Sherman's *Film Stills*. In doing so, Horn's work, rather than simply representing an identity such as 'woman' is actually engaged in questioning *how* perceptions and identities are formed, and how they might become something different. The repetition of images is one that actively cultivates, perhaps even demands, multiple glances.

It is not only the gaze of the viewer that is at stake in this encounter however. In each of the photographs Margrét returns her gaze in an exchange that echoes Édouard Manet's *Portrait of Victorine Meurent* (1862) [fig. 3.14]. Like Victorine, Margrét maintains eye contact with her viewers, issuing a forthright and sometimes demanding look in an address that makes the spectator aware of themselves as viewing subjects. As critics have argued of Victorine's gaze, and likewise Manet's *Olympia* (1863), the striking stare that looks back at the viewer was confronting and threatening in its suggestion of female self-possession.<sup>42</sup> It is important to remember, however, that the sense of self that is supposedly to be found in this gesture of the gaze was, for Manet's sitters at least, a contrivance of the male artist himself. As author of the paintings, it was Manet and not Victorine who held agency in these depictions resulting in what

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<sup>40</sup> Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), xii.

<sup>41</sup> Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 168.

<sup>42</sup> See for example: Linda Nochlin, 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?' (1971) in Amelia Jones (ed.), *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003).

Rebecca Schneider calls, 'a defiant gaze framed by an authorizing gaze – perspective countered and re-contained by perspective, locked at a standstill.'<sup>43</sup>

The gaze that Margrét extends, however, presents a different set of relations. One might hazard that the nature of the photographic medium used to present Margrét's image is one that circumvents the authorial paradox latent in Manet's paintings. Again, using Barthes's terms, the viewer can assume the veracity of the photograph of Margrét who *actually* exists before the camera – her 'having-been-there-ness'. The argument would then follow that the photograph is an index of her body and her gaze, over which she has control. Fundamentally, though, the photographs remain a contrivance of the artist, a series of situations set in motion by the photographer in which we have no guarantee that Margrét's expressions are her own rather than those directed by Horn. *Portrait of an Image*, which I introduced in chapter one, speaks to this point. Each of the photographs pictures Isabelle Huppert, but these are not portraits of the actress in the traditional sense. In these works Huppert slips back into a series of her film roles, impersonating herself acting out the different personas of the characters she has played. Bare faced and without any props, Huppert relies on her own postures and facial expressions to inhabit these multiple identities. As such it is difficult for the viewer to discern where Huppert ends and her characters begin. This represents a complex unfolding of subjectivity in which identity is understood as mutable and indeterminate. So too, it points to the way that images never exist as unmediated representations. When considered in these terms, then, it becomes clear that the photographs of Margrét in *You are the Weather* are no more likely to depict a truthful image of agency than those of Huppert.

Another point to consider here is the gendered relationship between Horn and Margrét. If Victorine's perspective was colonised by Manet's male authorship, then the question is whether Horn, as a female artist, presents a different perspective in her imaging of Margrét. Yet, to position Horn as a 'female' artist in this way would seem incongruous to her practice. Certainly, she is biologically a woman but she is also gay, Jewish, and has numerous other forms of identification. In this sense there is little value in attempting to ascribe an essentialised identity such as 'female' or 'lesbian' to

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<sup>43</sup> Rebecca Schneider, *The Explicit Body in Performance* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 25.

her gaze which would only serve to preclude the possibility of diversity.<sup>44</sup> Instead, I suggest, the notion of androgyny proves more useful in thinking about the gaze. In this thesis androgyny has been framed as a concept that does not fit neatly into binary categories, alternatively occupying ‘a space between’. As such it presents the possibility of an indeterminate number of identities being formed on multiple perceptual horizons. What Horn presents in *You are the Weather*, then, is something like an androgynous gaze, one that I think could not be rendered by a single image. Since the idea of androgyny that I have developed in relation to Horn’s work is one that opens up a space in which multiple identities can exist, the strategy of presenting Margrét’s image within a series of like pictures is particularly salient.

De Duve considers *You are the Weather* a play of address in which Margrét looks through the camera to Horn, apparently asking the artist ‘what do you want from me?’<sup>45</sup> Accordingly, the expected relations between photographer, subject and viewer are disassembled so that the work is more emphatically placed as an investigation into the processes of looking. The experiences that Horn orchestrates work by confronting viewers with their own perceptions, bringing to the fore the conditions by which those perceptions are formed. In doing so, I argue that Horn challenges dominant ways of seeing the world and by doing so disrupts the hegemony of specifically gendered horizons. Horn’s installation of *You are the Weather* presents a horizon in which identity is always in the process of becoming. The repetition of images that never settle into a fixed picture that represents Margrét as a ‘whole’ suggest, I think, a kind of androgynous gaze in which the act of ‘seeing’ is always open to the contingency of shifting perspectives on the horizon. In Horn’s installations the horizon acts as a boundary between the known and the unknown, the familiar and the unfamiliar. The ‘other’ can be placed across this border as the unknown to the known horizon of the subject. In so doing the distance between self and other can be maintained. The androgynous horizon, however, is one that confounds the authority of the existing

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<sup>44</sup> Jennifer Harding voices a similar concern over the idea of the ‘lesbian gaze’ writing that: ‘I am worried by the idea that a distinctively lesbian gaze exists, albeit open to contamination by a male gaze, and that lesbian representations are possible, albeit vulnerable to being ripped off by men. Firstly, these ideas tend to essentialise the categories ‘lesbians’ and ‘men’[...]. Secondly, the idea of a lesbian gaze as opposed to a male gaze tends to reproduce the categories ‘lesbians’, ‘lesbian sex’ and ‘men’ as singular and coherent entities and positionings.’ See: Jennifer Harding, *Sex Acts: Practices of Femininity and Masculinity* (London and New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1998), 136.

<sup>45</sup> de Duve, *Roni Horn*, 83.

binary order and embraces the unresolvable slippages between determinacy and indeterminacy.

The horizontal and enclosing panoramic installation of these images works to foreground Margrét's constantly changing personality, drawing out the subtle variations of expression that move around the room. Like the viewer's changing point of view as they move through the installation, this work suggests the diverse and ever mutable nature of identity. The same, as I have said, is true of *Pi*. The unending circular structure of *You are the Weather* points to the possibility of transformation and the impossibility of a permanently defined identity. Implicit to our perceptual horizon within which we view Horn's installations, then, are the multiple other views that we cannot apprehend, but which are *potentially* open to us, and to other viewers of the work. In making this acknowledgement, the viewer must then permit an openness to the other.

Carol Bigwood, following Merleau-Ponty, argues in this way that, if the experiential existence of the subject in relation to the horizon is always indeterminate then there can be no rigid bodily structures by which to inscribe strict gender designations. Gender binaries cannot exist, she continues, because the world is 'an open and indefinite multiplicity of relationships that are of reciprocal implication and that our bodies ambiguously join.' She goes on to describe the way that objects appear, disappear and form new perceptual links on the horizon in relation to the motility of our bodies. 'Relationships that I first perceived', she writes, 'start breaking apart and new ones form, motivated by an immanent significance in the perceptual field.'<sup>46</sup> In *You Are the Weather* and *Pi* the processes of fragmentation and reconstruction that Bigwood recites are crucial aspects of the experience of the work that gesture toward a re-conceiving of identity as always already embodying difference.

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<sup>46</sup> Carol Bigwood, 'Renaturalizing the Body (With the Help of Merleau-Ponty)', *Hypatia*, Vol. 6, No. 3, Autumn 1991, 64.

## Artwork and Beholder

The perceptual challenges that Horn's work poses to the viewer are ones that operate at the very core of the relationship between artwork and viewer. 'I hope' says Horn 'that the ultimate residence of the viewer in relationship to that work is not with the object but with the experience that affirms their presence and brings them more deeply into the world.'<sup>47</sup> In this sense, Horn's work articulates Merleau-Ponty's account of vision not simply as 'a way of seeing' but as an intertwining of *seeing* and *being seen*. *You are the Weather* initiates a series of interrelated gazes between photographer, subject and spectator. These images do not solicit an anonymous voyeuristic gaze from the viewer, but rather position the viewer as subject. What we experience is not so much a reversal of the gaze, but rather a reciprocal gaze is set in motion where Margrét and the viewer become both subject and object at once. Horn's installation, then, is a purposefully non-hierarchical one in which identity is constructed in relation to the other, not in opposition.

In his approach based in reception theory, Wolfgang Kemp suggests that 'the work of art and the beholder come together under mutually imbricated spatial and temporal conditions.' He goes on to contend that:

[...] [just as] the beholder approaches the work of art, the work of art approaches him, responding to and recognising the activity of his perception. What we will find first is a contemplating figure on the other side of the divide. This recognition, in other words, is the most felicitous pointer to the most important premise of reception aesthetics: namely, that the function of beholding has already been incorporated into the work itself.<sup>48</sup>

Kemp's thoughts here echo the important relationship between the viewer and the work in Horn's practice. As I have already noted, Horn considers the viewers the final component in activating her work; without them, the work does not exist. This is especially true given that her practice is so committed to exploring the processes of

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<sup>47</sup>Roni Horn quoted in Nancy Spector, 'Roni Horn: Picturing Place', Laurence Bossé, Marie Laure Bernadac et al. *Events in Relation* (Paris: Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1999), 31.

<sup>48</sup> Wolfgang Kemp, 'The Work of Art and its Beholder: The Methodology of the Aesthetics of Reception' in Mark A. Cheetham, Michael Ann Holly and Keith Moxey (eds), *The Subjects of Art History: Historical Objects in Historical Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 181.



perception. The very ‘subject matter’ of installations such as *You are the Weather* and *Pi* is a questioning of how we perceive and thus the ‘function of beholding’ is not only implied in the sense that visual objects such as paintings or photographs are intended to be looked at, but as the very object of representation and experience. That Horn’s installations are composed of a series of individual images, displayed in very specific ways means that they are clearly not absorptive – they do not create an immersive environment that transports the viewer to another place inside the image. Horn’s installations immerse the viewer in the space of exhibition – in the ‘actual’ space of their being. The spaces between images, in particular the spaces between the short sequences in *You are the Weather*, and the six-foot hanging height of the images in *Pi* activate the space in which the viewer is located.

Wolfgang Iser has argued that ‘once the reader is entangled, his own preoccupations are continually overtaken, so that the text becomes his “present” while his own ideas fade into the “past”’.<sup>49</sup> I do not believe that this is true of Horn’s work, however. While the viewer does become immersed, if not ‘entangled’, in the work so that it certainly becomes their ‘present’ this is not at the expense of their own ideas and sense of self. In fact it is, I think, crucial that the viewer of Horn’s installations does bring their ‘past’ with them. Viewer’s need to bring with them preconceived notions about identity in order for the installations to fulfil their disruptive potential. Stanley Fish criticises Iser’s theory as one that ‘has something for everyone, and denies legitimacy to no one.’<sup>50</sup> This is a criticism that posits Iser’s ‘reader’ as an ideal subject. While this certainly poses a problem for feminist critics who have questioned the validity of the kind of ‘perfect’ reader that is supposed by Iser’s approach, it proposes an interesting issue in the context of Horn’s practice. It is true that Horn’s work does not demand an ideal viewer either, but the notion of a shifting sense of determinacy and indeterminacy that the ‘something for everyone’ position evokes is one that seems perfectly fitted to androgyny’s in-between state. ‘On a phenomenological level’, Carol Lund-Mead argues, ‘androgyny represents the

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<sup>49</sup> Wolfgang Iser, ‘The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach’ in J. P. Tompkins (ed.), *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Poststructuralism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 64–65.

<sup>50</sup> Stanley Fish, *Doing What Comes Naturally: Change, Rhetoric and the Practice of Theory in Literary and Legal Studies* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1989), 74.

experience of becoming part of the other; or rendering the other part of the self.<sup>51</sup> This is a slightly different conception of androgyny to the one I have described in relation to Horn's work but it nonetheless captures the sense of openness that is reflected both in Iser's 'something for everyone' approach and Horn's own openness to difference.

## **Panorama**

Horn's all-encompassing horizon might also be thought of in terms of the legacy of the nineteenth-century phenomenon of the panorama.<sup>52</sup> These continuous circular paintings, often of majestic landscapes, epic battles or sweeping cityscapes, were housed in purpose built rotundas and were rendered in as realistic a fashion as possible so as to achieve the maximum sense of illusion. Viewers entering the space of the panorama were surrounded by a 360-degree image running around the circumference of the building, which, importantly, was intended to locate them *within* the totalizing space of the image.<sup>53</sup>

The panorama ostensibly provided a means of exercising control over the 'view'. The panorama's audience was invited at once to become spectator of the landscape representation and to project themselves into the space of the image itself; in effect, to inhabit the landscape before them. The experience of actually being *in* the landscape of the panorama was heightened by the use of props – fence posts, weapons or the edges of buildings, depending on the depicted scene – which actually projected from the image into real space. Often a space was maintained between the painting's surface and the edge of the viewing platform in order to complicate the

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<sup>51</sup> Carolyn Lund Mead 'Dante and Androgyny' in Amilcare A. Lannucci *Dante: Contemporary Perspectives*

<sup>52</sup> In 1787 artist Robert Barker registered his patent for the Panorama in London, the design of which was to remain largely unchanged. The panorama became a popular form of entertainment in Europe and America in during the nineteenth century, reaching its peak in the mid 1800s.

<sup>53</sup> In his study of the panorama, Bernard Comment points out that the landscape of the nineteenth-century was one that had been radically transformed by the burgeoning Industrial Revolution. 'The city exploded', he writes, 'becoming opaque, no longer visible. In conditions like these the panorama had a decisive role to play. Not only did it express the perceptual and representational fantasies that befitted such troubled times; it was a way of regaining control of sprawling collective space.' The unobstructed, all-encompassing picture presented within the rotunda thus provided a means of projecting coherence onto a chaotic world of vigorous urbanization. See: Bernard Comment, *The Panorama* (London: Reaktion Book, 1999), 8.

observer's perception of distance.<sup>54</sup> The spectator's view of the top and bottom of the panorama was also carefully managed so that any sense of a confining frame was removed. The panorama thus sought to create a sealed, hermetic space in which the observer could be fully immersed in the image. Oliver Grau suggests that the horizontality of the panorama functions as 'an aesthetic device that cloaks the observer's absorption into the "omnipresent" panorama image, and thus the intellectually creative mechanism of distance is threatened by the immediate proximity of the panorama.'<sup>55</sup>

The panorama is a tradition that can be thought of as a complication of Micheal Fried's concepts of absorption and theatricality. Fried has proposed the pictorial as an already embodied practice in which the act of viewing is intimately tied to an opticality that is located within the body.<sup>56</sup> In his *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot*, Fried argues that eighteenth-century French painting was a tradition characterized by pictorial absorption. In the work of artists such as Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin, Jean-Baptiste Greuze and Jacques-Louis David, Fried identifies the prevailing tendency of the painting's subject(s) to be cut off from the outside world, preoccupied instead with some specific task or lost within their own inner thoughts so that they are oblivious to 'everything other than the specific objects of their absorption.'<sup>57</sup> According to Fried, this sense of absorption within the painting also reflected what was expected of the beholder. As Christine Ross has put it 'the successful rendering of absorption in the painting functioned as a mirror of the absorptive state of the beholder before the finished work.'<sup>58</sup> By initiating this state of absorption in the audience, such painting thus denied the physical presence of the beholder before the work altogether. T.J. Clark uses the term 'self-containment' to describe the same effect:

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<sup>54</sup> Crary, 19.

<sup>55</sup> Oliver Grau, *Virtual Art: From Illusion to Immersion* (Cambridge, Mass.: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2003), 111.

<sup>56</sup> Stephen Melville, 'Phenomenology and the Limits of Hermeneutics' in Mark A. Cheetham, Michael Ann Holly, Keith Moxey (Eds.), *The Subjects of Art History: Historical Objects in Contemporary Perspective*, (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 148.

<sup>57</sup> Micheal Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 31.

<sup>58</sup> Christine Ross, 'Nothing to see?' in *The Aesthetics of Disengagement: Contemporary Art and Depression* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 167-68.

When I am in front of a picture the thing I want most is to enter the *picture's* world: it is the possibility of doing so that makes pictures worth looking at for me. Though of course the process of looking is egocentric, and I write 'I' all the time, the moment that the looking and writing are always waiting for is that of being *in the picture's place* – within the structure of experience the picture opens up for others to inhabit.<sup>59</sup>

According to both Fried and Clark, by projecting oneself into the pictorial space of the image, the spectator necessarily negates their own bodily presence within the physical space of their viewing.

However, despite the illusory intent of the panorama it was a medium that ultimately remained bound to a sense of theatricality, to use Fried's terminology. In Fried's view theatricality involves the dismissal of 'dramatic illusion vitiated in the attempt to impress the beholder and solicit applause'.<sup>60</sup> While the primary goal of the panorama was to create the illusion of another space/place existing through the picture plane in which the viewer might become absorbed, the sheer scale and structure of the panorama and the building in which it was housed attracted the enthusiastic attention of spectators who saw these panoramas as a popular form of entertainment. As Vanessa Schwartz has pointed out, early spectators of the panorama were impressed by the effect of these paintings and 'appreciated its substitute for reality', whilst the subjects depicted were only of secondary importance.<sup>61</sup> In addition to the spectacular materiality of the panorama, there was also the problem of the observer's physical engagement with the work as they moved around the viewing platform. The actuality of being within these purpose built rotundas was inescapably theatrical.

This sense of opening up both virtual or illusionistic space and actual space is one which resonates with Horn's installations of *You are the Weather* and *Pi*. In the same way that the panorama creates an all-encompassing visual field, Horn's works function by surrounding and enclosing the viewer within a continuous series of

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<sup>59</sup> T. J Clark, *The Sight of Death: an Experiment in Art Writing* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2006), 222.

<sup>60</sup> Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality*, 100.

<sup>61</sup> Vanessa R. Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in fin-de-siècle Paris* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 153.

singular images. There is, however, a fundamental difference in emphasis here. Where the panorama sought to activate space by drawing the viewer into the illusionistic plane of the image, Horn's photographs activate the real space of the gallery whilst, as I have already suggested, foregrounding the very act of looking. This operation is fundamental to all of Horn's works.

The panorama is ultimately governed by a logic that seeks but cannot fulfill the closure of the perceptual space between image and spectator. Jonathan Crary has argued that the panorama necessarily suffered from 'a detachment of the image from a wider field of possible sensory stimulation' and was thus unable to bridge the gap between the fiction of the image and the real world of its audience.<sup>62</sup> Crary also points out that the governing principle of the panorama was based on an implicit acceptance of the limitations of human vision.<sup>63</sup> The 360-degree view rendered in the panorama is one which exceeds the spectators ability to apprehend it so that the 'image is consumable only as fragments, as parts that must be cognitively reassembled into an imagined whole.'<sup>64</sup> This provided a radically different way of viewing landscape and its representation. Unlike the stable, singular point of view based on the laws of perspective which had characterized landscape painting since the renaissance, the panorama complicated such totalizing schemas of autonomy by presenting an expansive image that offered multiple points of view. These many potential views effectively heightened the gap between the 'subjective visual field and the possibility of a conceptual and perceptual grasp of an external reality.'<sup>65</sup> The sense of control and mastery implicit in the 'view from atop' was transformed in the panorama into a way of seeing and experiencing based on the accumulation of information; the drawing together of details from different points of view.

Jeff Wall's photographic work *Restoration* (1993) [figs. 3.15–3.16], which pictures the restoration of a panorama in Lucerne, Switzerland, dramatises this problem.<sup>66</sup> Toward the right hand edge of the image we see two young female conservators standing on a piece of scaffolding, one faces the surface of the painted panorama,

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<sup>62</sup> Crary, 19.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>66</sup> The Panorama is Edouard Castres's *Panorama of the French Army Entering Switzerland*, 1881.

engaged in her project of restoration, while the other looks in the opposite direction across the photographic picture plane so that her gaze extends beyond the frame of the photo. Another conservator stands on the panorama's viewing platform similarly directing her gaze to something outside of the photograph. Wall's picture is itself a cinematographic photograph, yet despite its expansive proportions it is unable to capture the full sweep of the panorama. The two women within the image look at what we, viewers of the photograph, cannot apprehend thereby intimating the enormous scale of the painting. Discussing this work Wall has said, 'a panorama can never really be experienced in representation, in any other medium. I made a 180-degree panorama photograph of a 360-degree picture, and so had to show only half of it. The geometry of that struck me as appropriate, ... it itself expresses the fact that the panorama is unrepresentable.'<sup>67</sup> In as much as Wall's work demonstrates the impossibility of re-presenting the panorama through the medium of photography, so too it foregrounds the impossibility of the panorama ever being perceived as a whole by the human spectator. Becoming a surrogate for the viewer's eye, the camera mimics the limited perceptual field of subjective vision. In doing so, Wall's photograph emphasises the artificiality of the panorama and its inability to express the full range of sensory experience.

Horn's recent permanent installation *Vatnasafn/Library of Water* (2007) [figs. 3.17–3.18], located in a former library in the small settlement of Stykkishólmur, Iceland, provides another example of the artist's interest in the experience of the horizon and the panoramic view. Situated atop an outcrop overlooking the sea, the building houses three of Horn's projects; *Water Selected*, *To Place* and *Weather Reports You*. Each of these works relates to the geography, morphology and meteorology of Iceland creating a kind of self-portrait of the country. The main space houses *Water, Selected* [figs. 3.19–3.20] which consists of a series of floor to ceiling tubes filled with water collected as blocks of ice from sites across Iceland. The building features a large curved glass window that looks out over the township and sea at the head of the Stykkishólmur promontory while a series of smaller rectangular windows run down one side of the gallery.

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<sup>67</sup> Jeff Wall, 'Restoration: Interview with Martin Schwander' in Thierry de Duve, Arielle Pelenc, Boris Groys and Jean-François Chevrier, *Jeff Wall* (London: Phaidon, 2002), 129.

Horn has likened *Vatnasafn/Library of Water* to a lighthouse, and indeed the lighthouse, with its panoramic view of land and sea, is a leitmotif that can also be found in *Pi*. Such viewing or surveying of the land from a point of elevation is one which suggests a Cartesian sense of control or mastery of the visible world enabled by a separation between subject and object. Wylie has described the experience thus: ‘those who gaze from the summit are able to do so in a neutral, critical, observational vein precisely because of the distance, physical but also ontological, which has been established between them and the objects of their gaze.’<sup>68</sup> This is a position very much associated with the nineteenth-century panorama and the paintings of artists such as Friedrich, which I have already discussed. Within the context of Horn’s practice, however, the observational view is drawn into conversation with the material experience of the land to create a dialectical encounter that positions vision as an embodied practice that occurs through our physical being-in-the-world. The exterior windows frame the ‘view’ outside and provide a counterpoint to the ‘experience’ of the land provided by *Water, Selected*. Briony Fer has suggested that these columns of water find their structuring logic in the reversal of interior and exterior: ‘The outside becomes an inside that draws into itself the traces of the environmental conditions that surround it.’<sup>69</sup> In doing so, Fer identifies the relationship between the panoramic picture of the land which we see framed through this expansive window (not unlike that which would be seen from the lighthouse which is photographed as part of the *Pi* suite [fig. 3.21]) and the literal experience of the material which constitutes so much of the Icelandic landscape in Horn’s installation as an ‘inside-out panorama.’<sup>70</sup>

The reversal of interior and exterior that we find in the inside-out panorama echoes the way that the horizon-like installations of *You are the Weather* and *Pi* function. Rather than placing viewers in a position of power where they look outward toward the art object that exists discretely from them, in these installations the viewer occupies the interior space of these installations. This represents a radical altering of position in relation to the artwork. It is a manoeuvre that also ripples out to destabilise the viewer’s experience of viewing the world at large. As though

<sup>68</sup> John Wylie, ‘An Essay on Ascending Glastonbury Tor’, *Geoforum*, No. 33, 2002, 444.

<sup>69</sup> Briony Fer, ‘Open Books: Briony Fer on Roni Horn’s *Vatnasafn/Library of Water*’, *Artforum*, Summer 2007, Vol. 45, No. 10, 174.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

invoking the words of Merleau-Ponty, Horn comments that ‘any sense of place is an ongoing summation of the dialectic relation the viewer maintains to the view.’<sup>71</sup> Horn’s interest in working between the visual and physical, where the spatial, optical and experiential qualities of photography function together is one which opens a new space for conceptualizing photography. There is a continual opening out where new relations between images and spaces are constantly evolving, providing us as viewers with new ways of seeing and experiencing. The horizon structure employed in *You are the Weather* and *Pi* is a potentially disorienting mode of placement that confronts the viewer with, and prompts questions about, the embodied and visual processes that are the ground for our ways of perceiving the world.

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<sup>71</sup> Horn quoted in Nancy Spector, 24.



## Chapter Four

### A Dwelling Perspective

#### The Act of Placing

*The Wizard of Oz brought me Kansas, if only briefly when I was young. And to this day Kansas is still one of the places I've never been. But since I watched Judy Garland journey to Oz, Kansas has inhabited my imagination, and Toto too. And in this way we come to dwell in places we've never been. It's a form of dreaming — these unseen places, only known through rumor, word-of-mouth, flights of fancy and a map — or no map — just a story told.*

– Roni Horn<sup>1</sup>

The folk paintings of Stéfan V. Jónsson, one of Iceland's most well known local artists, take centre stage in Roni Horn's photo-book *Herðubreið at Home* (2007) [fig. 4.1–4.9].<sup>2</sup> Each of the images in this volume provides a glimpse into the homes of resident Icelanders, picturing works by Jónsson that have found their way onto walls in living rooms, bedrooms and hallways. Jónsson (also called Stórval) is known for his abstract paintings of Mt Herðubreið, the national mountain of Iceland, a peak in the north-east of the island that is often referred to as the 'Queen of Icelandic Mountains'. His obsessive painting of this landmark has resulted in a large body of work that documents the mountain from numerous different vantage points throughout the changing seasons. In *Herðubreið at Home* Horn has embarked on a similar kind of encyclopaedic project. Here Jónsson's paintings are catalogued within

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<sup>1</sup> Roni Horn, unpublished text from the series *Iceland's Difference*, 2004–2005. [http://www.libraryofwater.is/icelands\\_difference\\_23.html](http://www.libraryofwater.is/icelands_difference_23.html). Accessed 23 September 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Roni Horn, *Herðubreið at Home* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2007). The Icelandic painter Stéfan Jónsson was born in 1908 and died in 1994. He painted images of Mt Herðubreið throughout most of his life and remains a popular folk artist in Iceland.

their domestic settings. Rather than occupying a reverential space as such paintings might in the austere space of the art gallery, his works sit alongside the personal accoutrements of everyday living and become part of the fabric of domestic life. Through Jónsson's work, *Herðubreið* is brought into the home and becomes a constant reminder of the natural environment that is so central to the experience of living in Iceland.

In *Weather Reports You* (2007) [fig. 4.10–4.14], another book produced in the same year as *Herðubreið at Home*, Horn presents a series of stories and anecdotes about the Icelandic weather.<sup>3</sup> These reports were collected by Horn, along with a small team of helpers, from residents in and around the Stykkishólmur settlement in the southwest of the island during 2005 and 2006. For Horn, this project was the beginning of a collective self-portrait in which personal experiences were brought together in a way that might reveal a more nuanced picture of an entire community or population. Although starting out in the small community of Stykkishólmur, Horn's ambition, as she notes in the introduction to the book, is to expand the project to collect stories from all over Iceland and, ultimately, other parts of the world. As she writes, 'everyone has a story about the weather'.<sup>4</sup> The stories in this volume vary from short and often amusing ruminations such as those of a fourteen-year-old who declares that:

The best weather is the weather I can play basketball in. The worst weather is when I can't play basketball, I think.<sup>5</sup>

More dramatic tales are recounted by older residents such as a forty-five-year-old man who tells of the experience of an avalanche:

I had a terrifying experience with the weather back when the avalanche fell on Súðavík. We were on our way there, and I was still on board the *Tyr* when we went around the north-western tip of Iceland to meet the Múlafoss. And I freely admit, I wouldn't say I was hysterical but my stomach was in knots. The weather was crazy too.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Roni Horn, *Weather Reports You* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>5</sup> Egill Egilsson in Horn, *Weather Reports You*, 75.

<sup>6</sup> Einar Þór Strand in Horn, *Weather Reports You*, 79.

Each weather report is accompanied by a brief set of details that identify the storyteller by name, date and place of birth, and occupation. Two maps are also printed at the beginning of the book; one is a double-page reproduction of the whole island, the other a detail of the area around Stykkishólmur. In providing these particulars, Horn adheres to the traditional conventions of the documentary genre where captions and other forms of contextual information are usually employed as factual coordinates that help objectively locate the collected material in time and place, thereby authenticating its veracity. These details also function to orientate the reader, allowing them to read the stories in relation to one another as well as place them geographically within the Icelandic landscape. Moving through the book, the reader gleans a sense of the unpredictability of the weather in this part of the world and the considerable influence it has both physically and psychologically on the way that people are able to live.

Both *Herðubreið at Home* and *Weather Reports You* adopt a kind of pseudo-documentary or anthropological approach in which the artist documents aspects of the lives of local Icelanders. Unlike the overwhelming experiences of the sublime that were the subject of chapter two, the books that are central to this chapter focus on ordinary, everyday experience. What Horn presents in these publications is an array of overlapping pictures of Iceland that represent perspectives on place from the point of view of those who live on the island. In this sense, I think that *Herðubreið at Home* and *Weather Reports You* are particularly salient examples of place constructed as a matrix of overlapping perspectives.

In the previous chapter I set out a model for interpreting Horn's installations within the context of the horizon. Focusing in particular on the works *You are the Weather* and *Pi* I argued that Horn's mode of display, that is, the placement of images around the entire circumference of the gallery, is one that creates a space in which the viewer is drawn into a dynamic encounter by which the very processes of perception are brought into question. The immersive, experiential nature of the installation relies simultaneously on the viewer's embodied participation in space and visual awareness of the photographic images. Geographically speaking, apprehension of a horizon places viewers *within* the landscape that they observe so that their experience of it is

irrevocably tied to their bodily relationship with that space. In this chapter I narrow my focus from considering the horizon as a broad conceptual tool for questioning the processes of perception, to look in a more concentrated way at a particular set of perspectives on place – perspectives that also originate from *within*.

My focus is on the way in which these experiences from ‘within place’ are played out through a number of dichotomous tensions; between public and private, inside and outside, local and global. What I argue is that close readings of *Herðubreið at Home* and *Weather Reports You* reveal the way in which Horn subtly complicates these oppositions so that no one position dominates another and perceptions of certainty are thus challenged. The sense of in-between-ness that is cultivated in these manoeuvres works to unsettle boundaries and points instead to the fragility and contingency of any one particular perspective. This in-between-ness thus points to a more open way of structuring the encounter between self and other. I certainly do not wish to assert that this is an androgynous encounter in the specifically gender orientated sense, but rather it is my view that the possibility of difference offered by the concept of androgyny is crucial to Horn’s thinking of place and identity as porous constructions. In *Herðubreið at Home* and *Weather Reports You*, I explore these blurrings of oppositions by examining three layers of experience suggested by the books. I firstly consider the ‘subjects’ of each project as those who live within Iceland. I then consider the way that Horn is implicated in the making of the books before finally turning to examine the experience of the reader in their encounter with the texts.

Drawing on the work of cultural anthropologist Tim Ingold, I take his concept of the ‘dwelling perspective’ as a key theoretical apparatus in exploring *Herðubreið at Home* and *Weather Reports You*. I suggest that these works function as an interesting articulation of place as dwelt-in-space, presenting multiple dwelling perspectives that are played out through a series of embodied experiences. Horn’s understanding of place as verb rather than noun is important here. Conceived of as a ‘doing’ rather than a ‘naming’, *Herðubreið at Home* and *Weather Reports You* engage with place as an environment that is brought into being as lived space.

Not only do these books convey a sense of what ordinary life is like in Iceland by documenting the homes and the stories of the people who call this place home, they also communicate something about Horn's relationship to Iceland. Referring to herself as a 'permanent tourist', Horn again defines her identity as an in-between state. I thus go on to argue that Horn's tentative connection to Iceland is one that dramatises the tensions between insider and outsider, local and tourist. Rather than locating her as ethnographer, recording with an objective eye, I argue that *Herðubreið at Home* and *Weather Reports You* function as a form of way-finding that suggest an act of 'becoming local' that Horn can never fully realise.

### **An Anthropological Perspective**

I want to begin by first briefly addressing Horn's approach to producing these books, which in a number of ways is quite different to the methodology employed in making the other works discussed in this thesis. More specifically, I refer here to the anthropological or documentary aspects of *Herðubreið at Home* and *Weather Reports You* which might seem to be at odds with the conceptual concerns that more often characterise her practice. Exceptions worth considering include the 'straight documentary' style of shooting that characterises her photography of Icelandic sheep folds in her artist book *Folds* (1991) or the photographs of hot springs in *Pooling Waters* (1994) that are shot in the same style.<sup>7</sup> Hal Foster has identified a move toward ethnographic or anthropological approaches in the field of contemporary art practice, resulting in the rise of what he calls the 'artist as ethnographer'.<sup>8</sup> Recent years have also seen a corollary increase in critical literature engaging with the crossings between art and anthropology or ethnography.<sup>9</sup> Both of these developments are in large part the product of an opening up of the global art market in response to postcolonial discourses that have precipitated an increased interest in perspectives from outside of the dominant Western institutions. One significant outcome of this has been the

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<sup>7</sup> Roni Horn, *Folds* (Book II of *To Place*) (Göttingen: Steidl, 1991); Roni Horn, *Pooling Waters* (Book IV of *To Place*) (Göttingen: Steidl, 1994).

<sup>8</sup> Hal Foster, 'The artist as ethnographer?' in Fred R. Myers (ed.), *The Traffic in Culture: Refiguring Art and Anthropology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

<sup>9</sup> See for example: George E. Marcus and Fred R. Myers (eds), *The Traffic in Culture: Refiguring Art and Anthropology* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1995); Arnd Schneider and Christopher Wright (eds), *Contemporary Art and Anthropology* (New York: Berg, 2006); Arnd Schneider and Christopher Wright (eds), *Between Art and Anthropology: Contemporary Ethnographic Practice* (New York, Berg, 2010).

growth and proliferation of international art exhibitions or ‘mega shows’, which themselves increasingly straddle a complex and often awkward position in relation to global and local concerns. This is a much larger topic than can be discussed in detail in this chapter, suffice to say that in a number of ways contemporary art has, to use George Marcus’s and Fred Myers’s words, ‘come to occupy a space long associated with anthropology, becoming one of the main sites for tracking, representing, and performing the effects of difference in contemporary life’.<sup>10</sup>

Daniel Miller writes that one of the accomplishments of anthropology, despite critiques of the history and methodologies of the discipline, ‘comes from its insistence in seeing the world through perspectives we would never have imagined if we had not forced ourselves into the site from which other people view their worlds.’<sup>11</sup> In this sense, the anthropological impulse certainly seems to coincide with the themes that have occupied Horn’s art, and with which this thesis has been concerned with developing. As a discipline ‘prized as the science of alterity’ anthropology offers tools with which to examine, for example, issues of ethnicity, class and sexual difference.<sup>12</sup> Horn’s practice is marked by a concern with sexual difference, although it is one that privileges difference rather than sexuality as the key term. In dealing with this difference, her approach is one that addresses issues of gender and the ‘other’ by engaging with notions of perception; of how we see and construct the world around us. Her work therefore has the potential not only to confront viewers with their own modes of perceptions, but also to place the viewer in a position of alterity.

In *Herðubreið at Home* and *Weather Reports You*, Horn self-consciously adopts an anthropological approach but works at once to exploit and subvert this mode of enquiry. The books offer the kinds of insights into other worlds that Miller suggests, presenting the reader with a series of perspectives on place from inside another community. Although, as Horn claims, these multiple narratives coalesce to suggest a detailed picture of this one particular part of Iceland, it is also paradoxically true that

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<sup>10</sup> George E. Marcus and Fred R. Myers ‘The Traffic in Art and Culture: An Introduction’ in George E. Marcus and Fred R. Myers (eds), *The Traffic in Culture: Refiguring Art and Anthropology* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1995), 1.

<sup>11</sup> Daniel Miller, ‘Introduction’ in Daniel Miller (ed.), *Home Possessions: Material Culture Behind Closed Doors* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2001), 15.

<sup>12</sup> Foster, 305.

the idea of place becomes increasingly indeterminate the closer one looks. In this sense we can think back to the close-up surfaces that I discussed in chapter two. Zooming in or drawing the viewer close to the surfaces of her photographic images, these works effectively set in motion a disorienting experience in which sharpness, clarity and detail are lost. In the same way, the differences between experiences of the weather in *Weather Reports You* (whether small or more substantial) gesture toward the impossibility of ever generating a detailed full-resolution image of ‘place’, ‘community’ or ‘weather’; the closer one gets, the more difficult it is to discern a big picture. Indeed, this realisation is one that recognises the inherent indeterminacy and instability of identity.

While these books on one hand function as a study of another culture, expanding out in some ways to consider more universal concerns with identity, they are also works in which the artist herself plays an important role in mediating the space between insider and outsider; a liminal position which clearly suits Horn. As the supposed ‘anthropologist’ initiating these projects, Horn plays out the very impossibility of maintaining a position of distance from the other. On this point I am reminded of the 2003 Danish film *Kitchen Stories* in which Swedish observers are sent into the homes of single Danish men to document their kitchen habits with a view to developing more efficient kitchen design.<sup>13</sup> In the course of the film a friendship between subject and observer ensues which threatens to undermine the whole study. *Kitchen Stories* provides a light-hearted view on the discipline of anthropology but it is one that captures a sense of the paradox inherent in Horn’s anthropologist guise. Horn’s is not an objective view from above or outside but is produced through intimate connections and interactions with different people who together form the communities that are the ostensible subjects of her works, and with whom her identity is also intertwined.

## Dwelling

In this regard both *Herðubreið at Home* and *Weather Reports You* can be usefully read through Tim Ingold’s notion of dwelling as a lived perspective on place. In a number of texts published since 1993, most recently his book *Perception of the*

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<sup>13</sup> Bent Hamer (dir.), *Kitchen Stories* (2003).

*Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* of 2000, Ingold has argued against the idea that ‘place’ exists outside of human experience. For Ingold, such a way of understanding the world only perpetuates dualities of subject/object, mind/body, nature/culture. Instead he proposes an alternative to the nature/culture dichotomy in which the world becomes a meaningful environment only through its being inhabited. This is what he calls ‘the dwelling perspective’.<sup>14</sup> Ingold builds on Martin Heidegger’s notion of dwelling, particularly as it was outlined in his essay ‘building dwelling thinking’, in which dwelling is positioned as an alternative means of expressing human ‘being-in-the-world’. For Heidegger, dwelling conjures ideas of home and inhabitation but might more fundamentally be understood as ‘the basic character of Being, in keeping with which mortals exist.’<sup>15</sup> For Ingold, then, place is understood as the ‘world as it is known to those who dwell therein’.<sup>16</sup> The dwelling perspective suggests a phenomenological approach to place that is rooted in everyday experience, where human embodiment, sociality and memory come to be incorporated *into* it. In this sense, place is not something that exists externally to human experience, but is something with which we are reciprocally intertwined.

Ingold introduces the notion of ‘taskscape’ as a tool that allows him to consider the temporality of landscape within his dwelling perspective. Drawing on the earlier work of sociologists Pitrim Sorokin and Robert K. Merton, Ingold’s taskscape elaborates the idea of ‘social time’, a concept that is embedded in the ‘activities that are indexical of a person’s belonging to locality and community’ and is sensitive to the ‘rhythmicity’ of landscape.<sup>17</sup> For Ingold, the taskscape refers to the ways humans inscribe themselves in place by using, inhabiting and moving through it. It is thus concerned with ‘the totality of tasks making up the pattern of activity of a community.’<sup>18</sup> At the same time as emphasising the importance of human interactions and movements through the land, however, social time and taskscape are also constituted through the relation of these human movements to the cycles of the natural

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<sup>14</sup> Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*, (London: Routledge, 2000). See also: Tim Ingold, ‘Epilogue: towards a politics of dwelling’, *Conservation and Society*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 2005, 501–508; Tim Ingold, ‘Culture on the ground: the world perceived through the feet’, *Journal of Material Culture*, Vol. 9, No. 3, 2004, 315–340.

<sup>15</sup> Martin Heidegger, ‘Building, Dwelling, Thinking’ in David Farrell Krell (ed.), *Basic Writings: From Being and Time (1927) to The Task of Thinking (1964)* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), 326.

<sup>16</sup> Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*, 191.

<sup>17</sup> Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*, 325.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*



world. In this way, taskscape is positioned by Ingold as a heterogenous approach; ‘tasks’ – that is the activities of everyday life – do not exist independently of each other or the natural environment. Instead they are performed in relation to one another in ‘an interlocking array.’<sup>19</sup> Ingold’s notion of dwelling as a lived, embodied experience is one that resonates with feminist scholar Rosalyn Diprose who writes that:

Dwelling is both a noun (the place to which one returns) and a verb (the practice of dwelling); my dwelling is both my habitat and my habitual way of life. My habitual way of life, ethos or set of habits determines my character (my specificity or what is properly my own). These habits are not given: they are constituted through the repetition of bodily acts the character of which are governed by the habitat I occupy.<sup>20</sup>

Like Horn, both Ingold and Diprose understand dwelling and place as acts or processes of being that are played out through the body in relation to the world in which it is situated. An important qualification to make about the term ‘taskscape’ is that it does not just refer to the types of tasks we might associate with ‘work’ or ‘labour’. Alternatively, the taskscape includes those endeavours associated with leisure and with the private life of the individual. Ingold does not make a distinction between the pursuits of the public and the private realms conceiving of them, alternatively, as integrated practices that are interwoven aspects of the taskscape.

Ingold’s notion of taskscape is particularly useful in thinking through the way in which place is represented in both *Herðubreið at Home* and *Weather Reports You*. As projects that are ostensibly documentary investigations, both books record the ways in which Icelanders use and inhabit their environment by engaging with their everyday lived experience; the profound impact that weather has on their way of living and the details of their domestic situations. Although the homes that Horn photographs in *Herðubreið at Home* are for the most part marked by the conspicuous absence of people they nonetheless vibrate with the act of living. Piles of books stacked on the floor suggest the importance of reading as a leisure activity; the kitchen sink surrounded by kitchen utensils in another image gestures toward

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 327.

<sup>20</sup> Rosalyn Diprose, *The Bodies of Women: Ethics, Embodiment and Sexual Differences* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 16.

everyday chores – food preparation and washing up after the meal; a dining table poses as a space for communal eating or, as the laptop and calendar suggest, might provide an ad hoc home work surface. These are activities in which the body is performatively engaged in the shaping and re-shaping of place. These are perhaps the most obvious tasks associated with the home but domestic dwellings such as these also imply a host of other decisions and acts that dictate the way in which the space is used, made and remade to reflect particular ways of living. The house is a structure that signals specific kinds of ownership and that establishes boundaries between what is considered public space and private space.

Within the private space of the home, material possessions such as furniture and artwork are arranged and displayed in ways that suit the particular lifestyles of its inhabitants and which also reflect their particular personalities and interests. This ‘dressing’ of the house is part of an embodied process in which the building is transformed into a ‘home’. Despite the repetitive strategy of photographing Jónsson’s paintings in the *Herðubreið at Home* images – a strategy that certainly adds up to demonstrate a sense of commonality between the homes – the images also capture the idiosyncratic differences that begin to personalise the spaces and highlight the disparate ways in which the individuals inhabit their dwellings. A photograph of a group of clocks all showing different times, for instance, suggests an interest in travel and different time zones while in another image the collection of porcelain dolls and other trinkets is revealed as a hobby, and books on modern art, Hieronymous Bosch and Stephen King suggest the eclectic reading habits of an avid bibliophile. The home, in this sense, has been positioned as a site that produces and reinforces self-identity, carrying as Iris Young asserts ‘a core positive meaning as the material anchor of identity.’<sup>21</sup>

*Weather Reports You* offers a more direct encounter with the multiple perspectives that are implied in *Herðubreið at Home*. Like the photographs of interior dwellings, the stories recounted in *Weather Reports You* are striking in terms of the way that similarity actually reveals differences in experience, and thus identity. The reports

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<sup>21</sup> Iris Marion Young, *Intersecting Voices: Dilemmas of Gender, Political Philosophy and Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 159.

represent a range of experiences from a cross-section of the Stykkishólmur population that tell of the way that climatic conditions affect both work and leisure activities:

I've had various jobs in my day, delivered the mail for several years and worked as a cleaner in Reykjavík where I lived for many years. But talking of the weather, it's affected me enormously, probably most when I was delivering the post and I woke up every morning and had to go out whatever the weather.<sup>22</sup>

There was bad weather for several days, we had a power cut and the electricity was off, the weather was completely wild. [...] but it was fun too because people got together in the house – it was cold, they cooked on a primus stove and drank mulled wine.<sup>23</sup>

I remember one particular New Year's Eve when the weather was so bad we couldn't set off fireworks. Everyone just had to save their fireworks for twelfth night.<sup>24</sup>

In these extracts, the daily delivery of mail and the cooking of food are familiar routine tasks. Similarly, the celebration of New Year with the letting off of fireworks is an event that takes place in many parts of the world. Horn's comment that 'when you talk about the weather, you talk about yourself' suggests that weather is intimately tied to our experience of place, and that the way we respond to weather says something about our sense of self. It becomes patently evident upon reading the reports that the weather in Iceland is very strongly connected to the shaping of community in Stykkishólmur and the way in which that community inhabits the land. Gill Perry identifies the multiplicity of experience within *Weather Reports You* when she writes of the book offering 'varying narratives of the Icelandic 'self' as sometimes battling, sometimes in tune with the ubiquitous weather. There are those who crave the dark and the solitude, and others who love the relative warmth and light of summer [...]'.<sup>25</sup> Yet weather is not the only force at play here in shaping identities. *Weather Reports You* is very clear in documenting the names, occupations and date of birth of the respondents. The effect of this is to add another layer of information that defines the social and economic strata of this community; it is not only the weather that exerts its influence on the making of this place. Listed occupations range from

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<sup>22</sup> Rebekka Bergsveinsdóttir, in Horn, *Weather Reports You*, 29.

<sup>23</sup> Ingibjörg Katrín Stefánsdóttir in Horn, *Weather Reports You*, 37.

<sup>24</sup> Helga Kristín Sigurðardóttir in Horn, *Weather Reports You*, 105.

<sup>25</sup> Gill Perry, 'Watery Weather', *Art History*, Vol. 32, No. 1, February 2009, 184.

farmer, fisherman, shopkeeper, and teacher to broadcaster, nurse, student, and clergyman; each with their own skill-set that contributes to the particular taskscape that makes up this area of Iceland.

In a subsequent version of *Weather Reports You*, produced in 2009 as a radio programme for BBC Radio 3, Horn and a team of interviewers made oral recordings of weather stories from people in the Norfolk area of England. The broadcast itself did not identify the individual names or occupations of the speakers but in her opening comments to the programme Horn makes of point of telling listeners that ‘we’ve recorded butchers, shopkeepers, post office workers, bar-tenders – strung together like a necklace of voices’.<sup>26</sup> Again, there is a sense in which the individual is defined in terms of the work they provide to the community. This resonates with early documentary practices such as that of German photographer August Sander whose long-term, though never completed project *People of the Twentieth Century* was an encyclopaedic catalogue of German people recorded in suites of portrait photographs according to occupational typologies [fig. 4.15–4.16].<sup>27</sup> I do not think that the same imperatives are at stake in Horn’s and Sander’s projects but it is clear that Horn’s use of this system is intended to call to mind the kind of classificatory indexes associated with the documentary genre. Sander’s work sought to create a catalogue that recorded social types and that fixed identity within a hierarchical structure. Horn’s work, alternatively, undermines this practice by finding endless difference within what ostensibly appears to be the same. Importantly, she also shifts perspective from a vertical hierarchical point of view to a horizontal model that opens outward in a levelling that considers the interconnectedness of identities and skills within the taskscape.

The gendering of the taskscape is also evident in *Weather Reports You*. In the same way that the domestic settings depicted in *Herðubreið at Home* invoke certain perceptions of gender identities, so too I argue that the occupations assigned to individuals in *Weather Reports You* can be read in relation to ingrained beliefs about the sexual division of labour. Most of the reports, which are documented in the first

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<sup>26</sup> Roni Horn, ‘Weather Reports You’ in *Between the Ears*, BBC Radio 3 broadcast, 10 January 2009.

<sup>27</sup> See: Susanne Lange and Gabriele Conrath-Scholl, *August Sander: People of the Twentieth Century* (7 Vols) (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002).

person, give little away in terms of the gender of the respondent. There are a few instances where interviewees, recalling experiences of the weather, refer to themselves as ‘a young girl’, for example, or make mention of husbands or wives. These are clues which very obviously betray a gendered identity but other more insidious genderings emerge through the reading of occupations in the text. Many of the jobs that are identified are easily associated as either traditionally male or female professions; housewife, teacher and nurse tend to be associated with women, while men are more quickly aligned with farming and fishing. That we can make such assumptions is part of the logic that writers such as Butler and Diprose have suggested; that we almost unavoidably, and probably unthinkingly, read the gestures, actions and appearances implied by these job titles as a gendered expression of those we presume to undertake the jobs.

The Icelandic context of *Weather Reports You*, however, also works to confound such assumptions. For those not familiar with the Icelandic language, the names of Horn’s participants are difficult to identify as male or female, and as such there is no quick confirmation or disruption of the viewer’s suppositions. Take for example the following names and occupations: Ægir Jóhannsson, a carpenter; Sigrún Þórsteinsdóttir, head teacher at a playschool; Freysteinn Hjaltalín, a fisherman; Guðmundur Ólafsson, a natural scientist and writer. While a playschool teacher is probably assumed to be female, the other jobs are more likely to be perceived as male careers. And indeed in these examples, such assumptions are proved correct. Yet while the gendering of work in this taskscape does for the most part appear to reinforce stereotypical binaries, there are instances in which these are undone by women working in positions of power; the Mayor of Stykkishólmur, for example, is a woman as is the Director of the Music School and the local Postmaster.

It is interesting to note, however, that while gender boundaries have been pushed so that opportunities for women have expanded to include a range of roles, the domestic realm still remains the domain of women. *Weather Reports You* includes narratives from five housewives in the local area but there is no mention of ‘househusbands’.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> The housewives are Oddný Ólafsdóttir (b. 1920), 71; Erla Harðardóttir (b. 1954), 116; Ingibjörg Árnadóttir (b. 1923), 128; Margrét Rósa Kjartansdóttir (b. 1936), 173; Kristín Björnsdóttir (b. 1931), 180.

There is a certain temporality to this division, with all of the women who designate themselves housewives being over the age of fifty. One might surmise from this that there has been a shift in which the domestic sphere has become equally the province of both sexes. However, I think it is fair to argue that while many more women are now active in the workforce and do not identify themselves specifically as ‘housewives’, the primary responsibility for maintaining the domestic environment is still one largely charged to women.

When considered in relation to the stories about Iceland’s extreme weather conditions in *Weather Reports You* these interiors take on further significance. In a place where the weather can often be so inhospitable, indoor spaces are even more important in providing shelter and safety, and sustaining community. Ingold writes of ‘the ‘indoors’ of the dwelling that is wrapped around its inhabitants like a warm coat’.<sup>29</sup> This is an archetypically feminine metaphor that suggests a womb-like sense of protection and nourishment; the home as a private refuge of security and comfort that is not impinged upon by the same strictures of the public world, for example the timetables and rules of employment. However, it is important to note that the distinctions between the home as a place of work and of leisure are not so clearly defined when it comes to the role of women within these spaces. Often still associated with the tasks of home life, the feminised domestic dwelling is for women a more complex site of both labour and leisure.

Many of the duties that are suggested in these spaces are stereotypically linked to the work of women; the role of the housewife traditionally being to take care of the home and the rearing of children. It is interesting to note in this regard that when we do see figures in these pictures, they are children. Other images in the book show spaces of respite, empty chairs or a soft couch to sink back into and watch television. These spaces of relaxation within the home tend to be more open to the male dweller rather than the female form whom the home is more often also a site of work.<sup>30</sup> The living room, for example, as William Douglas has argued, ‘is defined as male space, a place

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<sup>29</sup> Tim Ingold, *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2011), 122.

<sup>30</sup> See for example: Michael R. Real, *Exploring Media Culture: A Guide* (London: Sage Publications, 1996).

where husbands and fathers relax and, as such, a symbol of male authority.<sup>31</sup> In 1988 Henrietta Moore wrote of the gendering of the household in these terms, pointing out that:

The sexual division of labour in the home is related in complex and multifarious ways to the sexual division of labour in the workplace and in society at large. Women's subordinate position is the product of both their economic dependence on men within the 'family'/household and of their confinement to a domestic sphere by ideologies of mothering, caring and nurturing.<sup>32</sup>

Certainly the feminist movement since the 1970s has sought to liberate women from exclusively domestic roles and in the twenty-first century the relationship between women and the home is a much more complex and ambiguous one. More recently Stéphanie Genz has argued that the 'postfeminist housewife is no longer easily categorized as an emblem of female oppression but she renegotiates and re-signifies her domestic/feminine position, deliberately by choosing to 'go home'.<sup>33</sup> She goes on to suggest that postfeminist housewifery is a liminal position that incorporates a number of ambiguities and as such occupies an in-between space filled with intricacies and potentialities.<sup>34</sup>

The domestic setting of the home is a space that mirrors these ambiguities. Within fields such as sociology, anthropology and feminist studies, for example, the home has been a complex site of investigation linked inextricably to notions of the self, family and nation. However, Horn's photographs are not so much a matter of the artist leading the reader through a feminist narrative concerned with female subjugation. This would be a far too didactic tactic for Horn to employ. Indeed as I have been arguing throughout this thesis, I do not think that Horn's work resonates within the strictly feminist project of critiquing the oppression of women and asserting female empowerment. There is nothing specific in the images themselves to tie them to the work of women. We do not see a woman working at the kitchen sink

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<sup>31</sup> William Douglas, *Television Families: Is Something Wrong in Suburbia?* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2003), 99.

<sup>32</sup> Henrietta Moore, *Feminism and Anthropology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 126–7.

<sup>33</sup> Stéphanie Genz, "'I Am Not a Housewife, but ...': Postfeminism and the Revival of Domesticity' in Stacy Gillis and Joanne Hollows (eds), *Feminism, Domesticity and Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 50.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

as we do, for example, in Sherman's *Film Still #3* that I mentioned in chapter one. Nor do we see a mother attending to the children. By the same token it must be noted that we do not see men in these environments either. Outside of clearly situating these as photographs of domestic situations, her images do not suggest any particular division of labour. What I think is more clearly of concern in these images is the way that the domestic interiors call into question our ways of perceiving the world through ingrained gender divisions. Rather than pointing to a gendering of space through specific representations of men and women undertaking particular tasks within the home, Horn's photographs point to the implicit perception of a gendered taskscape within the domestic setting. In doing so, *Herðubreið at Home* pictures place not only in terms of the physical tasks undertaken by residents in the act of living within it, but also the way that these tasks are defined within specific perceptual horizons.

Another way of looking at the home is as a space of liminality or threshold. Like the stairwell displaying Horn's *Portrait of an Image* that I referred to in chapter one, the threshold is a space marked by a similar in-between-ness. Marking the passage between inside and outside, the threshold is a point of transfer rather than a firm, delineating border. In 'Building, Dwelling, Thinking', Heidegger rejects attempts to conceive of buildings as demarcating a boundary between inside and outside arguing that this would be to conflate a sense of space that is specific to existence with the notion of an objective space. Following this line of thought, Ingold has asserted that 'the dwelling is sustained by the continual coming and going of its inhabitants.'<sup>35</sup> The home is a space, a threshold, which acts as a point of entry or exit to or from a wider world beyond. In one of the pictures in *Herðubreið at Home*, Horn photographs the front door of a home, the very portal by which this coming and going takes place [fig. 4.5]. The entranceway is pictured from outside, looking into a hallway where one of Jónsson's paintings hangs directly opposite. Poignantly, this places Horn, and the viewer, in a different position to the other photographs in the book. The door itself is not visible but part of the glass panel doorframe, with doorbell and letterbox, cuts into the left hand side of the composition filling almost half of the frame. This architectural feature makes Horn's position on the outside of the dwelling clear and provides a contrast between exterior and interior surfaces; the slightly weather-worn

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<sup>35</sup> Ingold, *Being Alive*, 122.



blue door frame and the red and white walls beyond. The transitional nature of the doorway is further emphasised when this photograph is considered in relation to the rest of the sequence. The other images in the book are photographed from within the dwelling with little clue to the immediate outdoor environment given away, with the obvious exception of Jónsson's paintings. Hence we can assume that after photographing from outside the front door, Horn moves inside to explore the home further, perhaps discovering more of Jónsson's works. The process of crossing the threshold is therefore implied in all of the photographs.

In *Weather Reports You*, like *Herðubreið at Home*, a shifting orientation between inside and outside can also be identified. The stories of weather conditions very clearly demonstrate the experience of the outdoor environment but as many of the tales attest these experiences take place in relation to the experience of being sheltered in indoor spaces. Of a storm Magnís Alexandersdóttir recounts:

I was alone with the baby, I felt so insecure because the snow was up to the windows and it piled up against them [...] Then late in the evening I heard a knock on one of the living room windows, the one on the door out to the garden. [...] It was my husband and my brother and I told them I wouldn't open the door, I didn't want to let the heat out of the house, the power might be off for days and I wouldn't let the heat out. I refused to open the door for them and told them if they wanted to come inside they ought to dig their way in the front door.<sup>36</sup>

Of more agreeable weather conditions Jón Magnússon reports:

In Eskifjörður in 1949 was the best weather in the world, the best weather in Iceland up to this day. It was so sunny. I fell asleep and woke up with sun at my window. [...] I refused to go to bed at night, I slept in my clothes to be able to get out into the weather as fast as possible in the mornings. I would leap out of bed fully clothed and run down the stairs and out through the door, and the whole village would open up in front of me.<sup>37</sup>

In Magnís's account the home is variously experienced as a space of respite but also as a space of confinement in bad weather conditions; a place to escape the outdoors but sometimes also a space of imposed containment *by* the weather. A different oscillation between inside and outside is suggested by Jón's report. In his story the

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<sup>36</sup> Magnís Alexandersdóttir in Horn, *Weather Reports You*, 142.

<sup>37</sup> Jón Magnússon in Horn, *Weather Reports You*, 102.

house itself functions as a kind of temporal threshold, a holding space between experiences of moving into the outdoors.

Rudolf Arnheim reflects on the dichotomy of inside/outside in his essay 'Inside and Outside in Architecture'.<sup>38</sup> Central to the pursuit of architecture, he argues, is the question of the relationship between interior and exterior space. In this regard, the idea of being surrounded becomes key in unravelling these different forms of spatial experience. Rather than suggesting an 'inversion of ordinary space', Arnheim argues that the sensation of being surrounded is not only associated with our enclosure within a room or house, but is one that is experienced in the world at large.<sup>39</sup> Here too, Arnheim draws on the notion of the horizon that I discussed in chapter three, noting our being surrounded by 'the valley, the canyon of the street, the final enclosure of the horizon and the hemisphere of the sky'.<sup>40</sup> Our sense of being inside or outside, he further asserts, is thus always experienced relative to being inside or outside of other things. Like the multiple views on the horizon that I described in relation to Horn's *You are the Weather* and *Pi* installations, perception is always experienced in relation to our particular, albeit potentially changing, position.

One of the characteristics of the inside/outside relationship that Arnheim develops is the impossibility of both aspects being seen or experienced at the same time. From a location outside, like Horn's position in taking the photograph described above, only a glimpse or fragment of the interior space can be seen. So too, while the dweller may be able to see a view from the window, the exterior of the dwelling cannot be apprehended from inside. As Arnheim puts it 'one cannot see one's face'.<sup>41</sup> Likewise, the interior space is never visible in its entirety. Viewing only ever represents a particular position in relation to the horizon. On this point the *Herðubreið at Home* photographs reflect the same kind of oscillations as the *Pair Objects* that I introduced in my first chapter. The identical but separated objects entice viewers to walk between them, comparing them for similarity and difference. Unable to see both objects at the

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<sup>38</sup> Rudolph Arnheim, 'Inside and Outside in Architecture' in *The Split and The Structure: Twenty-Eight Essays* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 1996). Originally published in *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 25, Fall 1966.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 48.

same time or from the same angle (depending on the installation) the viewer is never able to fully discern the relatedness of the forms or construct a ‘true’ picture of their identity.

In *Herðubreið at Home*, I think Horn’s framing of the photographic images clearly relates to this concern with the experience of perception. Although each image is centrally anchored by one of Jónsson paintings, the surrounding pieces of furniture and architectural features of the spaces are quite dramatically cropped or cut off in ways that indicate the existence of more beyond the edges of the photographs; another instance of images in excess of their frames. In one image a pile of books is bisected so that the full titles cannot be read, in another picture a dining table and chairs extend beyond the picture plane, and in the photograph of a living room only one end of the couch occupied by a small boy and the feet of another child sitting nearby can be seen. This severe cropping of the photographs works in contrast to the self-contained compositions of Jónsson’s paintings in which the image resides squarely within the frame rather than gesturing outward to what might extend beyond it. Acting as a disruptive echo to the overwhelming sense of interiority that characterises Jónsson’s canvases, Horn’s photographs signal outward in a way that I think places the images on a visual threshold themselves.

The framing of photographs in *Herðubreið at Home* also emphasises Arnheim’s assertion that the interior space can never be apprehended in its entirety. The glimpses inside that these photographs offer are representations from a singular point of view in which the rest of the picture can only be imaginatively reconstructed. Again we can think back to Merleau-Ponty’s description of the horizon in the previous chapter. Objects that we perceive against the horizon are only visible to us in part from our specific point of view. Rather than perceiving a unified, total object we anticipate the unseen parts of the object. In this way, all objects against the horizon represent an inexhaustible number of potential perspectival views. In terms of Horn’s wider practice and the concerns of this thesis, the *Herðubreið at Home* photographs in my view can be seen to reiterate the artist’s interest in challenging modes of perception. By orchestrating encounters that prompt viewers to form questions in response to images (and installations) and to imaginatively open themselves to new possibilities,

Horn's works reveal an androgynous position that encourages the notion of difference and provides an opportunity to experience identity in its multiple forms.

### **Dwelling and Visuality**

The paintings by Jónsson that adorn each of the interiors in *Herðubreið at Home* further reflect the oscillations between inside and outside that I have just discussed but they also reflect the way that identity is formed in relation to landscape through physical as well as visual means. Jónsson's commitment to documenting Mt Herðubreið throughout his life suggests a particularly strong tie to place. Born in Modrudalur, a desert valley town in north-eastern Iceland that sits close to Mt Herðubreið, he spent much of his life here. I think it is fair to conjecture that Jónsson's own experience of the mountain and the surrounding region involved embodied practices like those I have described in relation to the residents that have become part of Horn's recent book projects: experiences of weather, of walking in the landscape, of carrying out everyday tasks and, of course for Jónsson, the act of painting Herðubreið. However, Jónsson's paintings also engender encounters with place that are played out through the flat surface of the canvas. His experiences of Mt Herðubreið, then, are tied up as much with a visual apprehension of the world as they are with embodied encounters.

It is worth reflecting here on Paul Cézanne's preoccupation with painting Mont Sainte-Victoire [fig. 4.17]. Near his hometown of Aix-en-Provence, Cézanne produced over 60 paintings of the same mountain from the early 1880s to his death in 1906. This was a place that, as Nina Athanassoglou-Kallmyer notes, 'was familiar and deeply evocative territory for the painter, rich in memories of adolescent roamings in the company of his friends [...].'<sup>42</sup> It was also an area that became the focus of his phenomenologically inspired philosophical deliberations.<sup>43</sup> For Cézanne, his paintings of Mont Sainte-Victoire were a means of connecting with the landscape that he felt a deep and reciprocal relationship with. As he wrote: 'the landscape thinks itself in me

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<sup>42</sup> Nina Athanassoglou-Kallmyer, *Cézanne and Provence: The Painter in his Culture* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 149.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

[...] and I am its consciousness.’<sup>44</sup> In the essay ‘Cézanne’s Doubt’, Maurice Merleau-Ponty described the artist’s distortions of perspective and faceted brushwork within these canvases as an effort to ‘depict matter as it takes on form’ thereby giving ‘the impression of an emerging order, of an object in the act of appearing.’<sup>45</sup>

Jonathan Crary, however, argues that despite Cézanne’s claims to this merging of body and landscape his paintings are still a product of the cultural milieu of their production, one that was in fact very strongly entrenched in the modernist ideals of authority, power and control; principles which of course also resonated through my discussion of the Romantic movement in chapter two.<sup>46</sup> During the nineteenth century, ‘seeing’ was still very much associated with ‘knowing’ and as such Cézanne’s paintings of Mont Saint-Victoire can be seen as exercises in which the artist attempts to capture and express the mountain’s authentic identity, which Cézanne has come to know through his own intertwining with the landscape. Crary argues, on the contrary, that Cézanne’s almost obsessive painting of Mont Saint-Victoire ‘did not lead to a fuller and more inclusive grasp of its presence, its rich immediacy. Rather it led to its perceptual disintegration and loss.’<sup>47</sup>

This process of disintegration that Crary posits is useful in thinking about Horn’s investment in photographing Jónsson’s paintings of Mt Herðubreið. Horn’s work presents the notion of identity as unfixed and contingent, always open to change. Frequently she employs strategies of doubling and repetition, as I discussed in chapter one, to problematise the idea of unity and fixed subjectivity. What I argue is taking place in the repetitive painting and display of Jónsson’s paintings is a continual process of placing and belonging. For both the painter and the owners of the works the images become meaningful through the practice of looking, which reinforces the beholder’s connection to the landscape that is depicted. This represents a different relationship to place than is suggested by Cézanne in his supposed intertwining with Mont Saint-Victoire.

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<sup>44</sup> Paul Cézanne quoted in Wylie, 2.

<sup>45</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, ‘Cézanne’s Doubt’ in Ted Toadvine and Leonard Lawler (eds), *The Merleau-Ponty Reader* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 74. Originally published 1945.

<sup>46</sup> Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle and Modern Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000), 288.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

Read through Horn's photographic project, the multiple iterations of Herðubreið that Jónsson has reproduced on his canvases represent a fragmentation of identity rather than a search for its truth. Each of Jónsson's paintings are remarkably similar to one another. Stylistically they follow the same set of conventions; the flat-topped mountain is abstracted to a flat form that is central to the composition, horizontal planes dissect the picture surface often acting as a horizon line in the landscape or 'capping' the top of the mountain, broad areas of flat and generally bold colours add to the sense of spatial dislocation enacted by the horizontal divisions [fig. 4.18]. However, the paintings each depict the mountain in different conditions, different times of day or season, and from different angles and proximity. The sameness of the paintings then exists alongside their difference. In this sense I argue, like Crary, that the multiple perspectives do not bring the artist, or the viewer, closer to knowing the mountain but rather represent the impossibility of authentically defining it. In a way similar to Horn's zooming in on the photographic surface in the *Pooling–You* series, a gesture which ultimately led to an abstraction where the image became indiscernible, the continual repetition of both Cézanne's and Jónsson's paintings reflects a process that distances the viewer and leads further away from any kind of certainty.

In his book *Landscape*, John Wylie has noted the tendency for methodologies based on the dwelling perspective to 'involve a rejection of the visual gaze,'<sup>48</sup> further suggesting:

that rather than focusing upon a critique of particular forms of  
visuality, and their associations with [...] discourses of objectivity,  
control and authority, the task of a dwelling perspective upon  
landscape should involve a reconfiguration of vision such that [...] the  
activity of gazing is itself understood as a practice of  
dwelling.<sup>49</sup>

I argue, then, that while dwelling can be read as an act of embodied habitation in the two book projects that I have introduced, they also rely on an implicit understanding of visuality as an intrinsic component of the lived experience of place; that is to say, that the act of looking is itself a form of embodiment and a form of dwelling.

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<sup>48</sup> John Wylie, *Landscape* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 145.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

In these terms, the paintings of Mt Herðubreið that are so prolifically represented in the Icelandic homes that Horn invites us into are not only images or representations *of* the world but, within their ‘lived’ context, are images *within* the world. Looking at the paintings becomes an everyday activity, an integrated part of the experience of dwelling. In seeing these works while sitting in the lounge, carrying out other tasks or walking past them in a corridor, the paintings become part of a scene that the inhabitants are actively caught up in producing. The act of repeatedly looking at the paintings of Mt Herðubreið – a symbol of Iceland and thus of home – is also to reaffirm one’s belonging to this place.

In *Weather Reports You*, the experience of seeing emerges as an important means of engaging with the weather. To quote from the entries:

I never see the sun without starting to tingle and I’m outside at once.<sup>50</sup>

I always find the weather beautiful when I look outside, so I think I’m always in a good mood.<sup>51</sup>

The visual experience of the weather exists as one amongst numerous other sensory experiences that constitute the perceptual engagement with the world. These views of the weather exist, in the narratives of *Weather Reports You*, in relation to the sound and the feel of blustery winds and chilling temperatures, creating an encounter that positions vision as an embodied practice that occurs through our physical being-in-the-world. Ingold has noted the propensity for scholars to neglect visuality in studies that examine the way that weather affects our perception and experience of place. He observes that while weather encountered ‘out of doors’ invariably involves a multisensory experience, the role of vision remains an integral aspect of how we make sense of the weather.

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<sup>50</sup> Sigurður Hjartarson in Horn, *Weather Reports You*, 69.

<sup>51</sup> Alma Arnórsdóttir in Horn, *Weather Reports You*, 149.

## The Temporality of Dwelling

Weather is not only bound to the sensory experience of the present, however. The weather can change radically throughout the course of the day, and also runs through annual changes of season. This cyclic aspect of weather and climate affects the world in which we dwell in certain predictable ways, but can also at times bring unexpected conditions. In summer we look forward to warmer weather, longer days and more sunshine hours. Winter brings colder weather, perhaps rain, snow or hail. These seasonal changes dictate the way that the year is organised, and we rely on the regularity of the weather in this sense. Naturally, industries like farming depend on predictable weather cycles so that crops can be reliably planted and harvested, but so too seasonal change affects cultural behaviours, for example the tendency to take holidays during summer months when the weather is better. Memories recounted in the form of weather stories or through possessions in the home, or geological memory recorded in earth rocks and mountains suggest another way in which to frame time-based relationships with the world.

The temporality implied in these kinds of cycles is an important aspect of Ingold's dwelling perspective. The cycles of human life, he argues, exist as an intrinsic part of the rhythms of the world at large. He writes that: 'the rhythmic pattern of human activities nests within the pattern of activity for all so-called living things, which nests within the life-processes of the world.'<sup>52</sup> The temporality that Ingold describes is tied to phenomenological experience. As dwellers in the world, we perceive time 'not as spectators, but as participants in the very performance of our tasks' and in relation to the natural cycles of, for example, the weather. Landscape and place, according to Ingold, is constructed through the temporalities of the natural world and the temporalities of the taskscape, which are fused together in a 'process of becoming of the world as a whole.'<sup>53</sup>

A sense of the temporalities of place is a recurring theme in Horn's art practice. In the installation *Pi*, for example, which I discussed in chapter three, the frieze-like

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<sup>52</sup> Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*, 201.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.



installation of the work, with no beginning or end, is evocative of the endless repetition of cycles in the natural world. Indeed, this is also echoed in the title of the work: pi is a mathematical constant that cannot be rendered in a finite sequence. The images of eider that are collected by Hildur and Björn show how their livelihood is tied to these recurring cycles, while the television images of an American soap opera indicate another kind of cycle; the weekly routine of catching a favourite programme. The routines that are suggested by the taskscapes I have described in *Herðubreið at Home* and *Weather Reports You* similarly evidence the way that temporalities of the natural world and human culture are intertwined.

In the context of the gender issues that I have addressed in this thesis, I think it is also important here to consider the specifically female connotations of thinking in terms of cycles. There has been a long tradition in Western thought of associating female attributes to nature. Like the supposedly female qualities of water that I described in chapter two, the cycles and seasonal changes of the natural world have been equated to the reproductive cycles of the female body. Notions of the land as ‘fertile’, ‘womb-like’ and ‘maternal’ go back, for instance, to Classical mythology in the story of Demeter and Persephone and can be found in the seventeenth-century aesthetic pleasures of nature and the female landscape, through to the sexualised industrialised landscapes of the nineteenth century that are penetrated by the technologies of ‘man’.<sup>54</sup> In the twenty-first century, landscape and the natural environment have become ecologically contested sites where ‘mother nature’ and the zeitgeist of global capitalism has for many precipitated a return to the land for a way of life more nurturing and nourishing. These instances of a female gendered landscape are, of course, produced from a distinctly male point of view, one in which the natural world becomes the object of male power and control.

I argue, however, that Horn’s attentiveness to cyclic repetition does not revert to or reinforce this kind of feminising of landscape nor does it seek to re-colonise landscape from a female point of view. Rather, the cycles and rhythms of Horn’s work become meaningful in the acknowledgment of an inherent instability. Here

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<sup>54</sup> For a fuller discussion of the feminine landscape see for example: Patricia L. McGirr, ‘The Vietnam Veterans Memorial: Landscape and Gender in the Twentieth Century’ in Deborah L. Rotman and Ellen-Rose Savulis (eds), *Shared Spaces and Divided Places: Material Dimensions of Gender Relations* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003).

again, Horn's approach reflects the feminist challenge to deconstruct accepted categories of identification and suggest new ways of thinking about conventional divisions. As I have argued throughout this thesis, in Horn's work the question is not one of how to present an empowering female experience but rather how the 'in-between' state of androgynous being might inform her practice as well as our being-in-the-world more broadly. Cycles, in the context of androgynous experience that I have outlined in this thesis, represent the possibility of change and renewal; an openness to the potential for difference to be continually made and remade in the same way that the land itself is always in a state of flux.

Indeed, Horn's work in Iceland suggests that she is keenly aware of the natural world as a volatile and altering space, and how this affects the way in which dwelling is shaped. Iceland is a geologically active land mass. The island has many volcanoes, thirty-five of which are active, as well as geysers and thermal pools that indicate the tumultuous processes taking place below the earth's crust. Indeed, Mt Herðubreið itself is a volcano whose distinctive shape was formed by lava erupting through a sheet of ice. That the land is often conceived of as solid and permanent in relation to the fragile human body is really a fiction resulting from the different time scales in which human and geological life operates. Iceland, however, is still very much geologically active so that life there is defined by the unpredictability and restlessness of the land. That this is a landscape still in a continual process of forming itself was evidenced recently by the 2010 eruptions of Eyjafjallajökull that disrupted air travel around the world. In numerous works Horn has been drawn to the geological features of Iceland. The hotpools and geysers that are found in many of her photographs, *You are the Weather* or *Doubt by Water* for example, have become allegories for the changeability of identity. Similarly, Horn's artist's books *Bluff Life* (1990) and *Lava* (1992), both part of the *To Place* series, take the volcanic rocks found across Iceland as their subject matter.<sup>55</sup> In their attentiveness to the inherent instability of the geological world, I argue that these works relate strongly to an androgynous way of

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<sup>55</sup> Roni Horn, *Bluff Life* (Book I of *To Place*) (1990). In *Bluff Life* Horn published a suite of thirteen watercolour and graphite drawings produced in 1982 during her stay in a lighthouse off the southern coast of Iceland. The book contains thirty-six pages with fourteen colour reproductions; Roni Horn, *Lava* (Book III of *To Place*) (1992). *Lava* includes a series of photographs of volcanic rock that are pictures against a white background like scientific samples. The book was produced as a ninety-six page publication with sixteen colour and twenty-nine tritone reproductions. It also includes extensive letterpress printing throughout.

experiencing place. Rather than settling into a proscriptive and fixed conception of how we live in and experience the world, Horn's works bring to light the inherent difference in temporalities that govern our dwelling and in doing so I think that they also reinforce the notion of difference that characterises identity at an individual level.

In terms of the taskscape of human activity, the temporality of dwelling also extends into the realm of memory. Ingold argues that 'to perceive the landscape is to carry out an act of remembrance, and remembering is not so much a matter of calling up an internal image stored in the mind as of engaging perceptually with an environment that is itself pregnant with the past.'<sup>56</sup> He goes on to suggest that landscape is 'constituted as an enduring record of – and a testimony to – the lives and works of past generations who have dwelt within it, and in so doing, have left something of themselves'.<sup>57</sup> Memory is implicit to the experience of dwelling in both *Herðubreið at Home* and *Weather Reports You*. Expressed through the materiality of the house and the possessions within it, the photographs in *Herðubreið at Home* display the concrete evidence of past dwellers who made up the taskscape of the same place in a previous time – architects, builders, plumbers, designers, etc. Jónssons paintings, too, echo the kinds of images and objects many of us collect to adorn our living spaces to remind us of home or of places we have been – either way they become embedded in our experience of the everyday and our routines of living.

The stories in *Weather Reports You* represent another practice of remembering where the past and the present become entangled in one another. From the lived experience of the storyteller, accounts of the past exist within the same temporality as those of the present. The act of recounting memories, as in *Weather Reports You*, can be seen as another way of affirming one's belonging, both in time and place.

### **A Permanent Tourist**

Horn has referred to herself as a 'permanent tourist' within Iceland's borders. This is an interesting designation that again speaks of a kind of in-between-ness. Her standpoint in relation to Iceland is not one of a passing visitor but neither is she a

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<sup>56</sup> Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*, 189.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

resident local. Her identification with Iceland is a more complex one to be found somewhere *between* being an insider and an outsider. In the same way that the 'dwelling perspective' has been misappropriated to suggest an opposition between embodiment and visuality, so too it has been used to impose the dualism of insider/outsider. The insider – the dweller – is generally associated with a meaningful and embodied relationship to place – played out through tasks such as the kind of leisure and work activities that I have already mentioned, while the tourist remains an outsider who predominantly engages with place through a voyeuristic gaze and an interest in the 'scenic'.

Reiner Jaakson has used the term 'permanent tourist' to describe second-home owners who he argues live in a constant state of travel anticipation. According to Jaakson, the owners of these properties are continuously aware of their imminent departure, and the degree of anticipation they experience reflects the frequency of their travel.<sup>58</sup> Equally, he argues there is an inversion in which experience of the holiday destination is 'influenced by the awareness of the certainty of return to the other.'<sup>59</sup> A final point he makes in this essay concerns the experience of time. Tourists holidaying to a schedule may experience a 'time boundedness' and thus feel the need to get as much of the touristic experience as possible out of their break, while the second-home owner, with the assurance of repeated visits ahead of them, enjoy a more leisurely passage of time. There is also, he notes, the potential problem of social distance between tourists and locals.

While the relationship of tourist to local has been one that seems to reinforce an opposition of outsider/insider, recent tourism scholarship has refocused attention on the ways in which tourists, like residents, perform their experience of place as 'a way of being in the world, encountering, looking at it and making sense.'<sup>60</sup> In this way, tourists become part of the same taskscape of place as those who permanently dwell therein. Although tending to dwell in their holiday destinations for only short periods of time, thus not developing the kind of temporally-embedded connection to place

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<sup>58</sup> Reiner Jaakson, 'Second-home Domestic Tourism', *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 13, No. 3, 1986, 367–391.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 389.

<sup>60</sup> Jørgen Ole Bærenholdt, Michael Haldrup, Jonas Larsen and John Urry, *Performing Tourist Places* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), 2.

that Ingold proposes of more permanent residents, the presence of tourists is a crucial aspect of how many places operate, both economically and socially. In this sense place is not a fixed entity which exists in contrast to the more dynamic flows of culture, tourists and images, for example. It is as Simon Coleman and Mike Crang have noted, ‘fluid and created through performance.’<sup>61</sup>

In volume one of *Pooling Waters* (1994) [fig. 4.19–4.21], Book IV of *To Place*, Horn engages with the natural environment of Iceland as a site of leisure for both locals and tourists.<sup>62</sup> Known for its geothermal activity that has given rise to natural hot pools all over the island, tourists travel to Iceland to bathe in the warm waters and to experience the often dramatic landscapes in which they are located. While many of these hot pools exist in their natural state or as crudely constructed outdoor pools, Iceland also has a number of spas that have been built to capitalise on these geological features and the visitors who come to see and use them. Horn’s photographs deftly capture a sense of the appeal of these striking sites; tracts of water that meander through green grassy banks, larger expanses of milky blue water from which plumes of white steam rise contrasted with more built up swimming pool complexes. Almost all of the photographs are populated by groups of bathers, a number of whom we can assume are tourists. Their presence in the landscape of Iceland becomes as much a part of the making of place as the dwelling of locals.

Yet, as I have pointed out, Horn’s relationship to Iceland is not one of passing tourist or local resident. Instead she connects to Iceland from a liminal position somewhere between these two positions. The photographs in *Pooling Waters* are not the kind of snapshot imagery that we might typically associate with the tourist memorabilia of holidaymakers recording their experiences of foreign destinations. Mark Godfrey writes that once we acknowledge Horn’s relationship to Iceland as somewhere in which ‘to place’ herself it is clear that her project could never simply be one of photographing scenic images of the landscape and collating these images. ‘Such publications’ he argues, ‘would merely be a souvenir of a country that happens to

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<sup>61</sup> Simon Coleman and Mike Crang (eds), ‘Grounded Tourists, Travelling Theory’ in *Tourism: Between Place and Performance* (New York and Oxford: Brehahn Books, 2002), 1.

<sup>62</sup> Roni Horn, *Pooling Waters*, Book IV of *To Place*, 2 Vols (Göttingen: Steidl, 1994).

have had an effect on her.’<sup>63</sup> Godfrey similarly notes that providing a critique of tourist imagery, as artists such as Dieter Roth have done, would not satisfy Horn’s aims of conveying something of the process of how Iceland places her.<sup>64</sup> This, I think, gets much closer to the core of *Pooling Waters*, as it does *Herðubreið at Home* and *Weather Reports You*. Neither tourist imagery or anthropological documentary, nor truly a critique of these practices, Horn’s photographs evidence an interest in how place is made and how she, and others, are made through place.

Inasmuch as Horn’s books can be seen to tell us something about the nature of dwelling and of the experience of Iceland in particular, the texts are also very much about the artist and her relationship to the island. I argue, then, that rather than performing exercises in ethnography or anthropology, *Herðubreið at Home* and *Weather Reports You* are projects that have allowed Horn to undertake her own journey of placing. Both *Weather Reports You* and *Herðubreið at Home* represent the performance of Horn’s potential belonging as much as they rehearse the belonging of the native Icelanders. In travelling around parts of Iceland, in recording stories and in photographing homes, Horn initiates a series of encounters that become part of an endeavour to establish her connectivity with this place. In this context, I think that Jaakson’s notion of the anticipation experienced by ‘permanent tourists’ resonates in Horn’s work and with her relationship to Iceland. The identity of permanent tourists suggests an anticipatory state of constant possibility. Anticipation gestures toward the brink of change so that any moment can only be conceived of as provisional. It is a sensation that precludes the kind of fixed identities that are associated with the binary models that Horn’s work tries to negotiate. As a metaphor, the notion of anticipation is suggestive of ‘place’ as continually unfolding, made and remade through the performances or acts of living that occur in our relationship with the world.

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<sup>63</sup> Mark Godfrey, ‘Roni Horn’s Icelandic Encyclopaedia’ *Art History*, 2009, 948.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. Godfrey takes Dieter Roth’s work *Reykjavik Slides* (1973–1995 and 1990–1993), an installation of 30,000 slides that document every building in Reykjavík, as an example of this kind of critique of the touristic gaze. This is a work that through its obsessive collation of images evidences an interest in the anti-spectacular that seeks to undermine any pretence to the uniqueness of touristic encounters. The work speaks to the way that the tourist experience is now arguably experienced through the lens of the camera.

## Way Finding

In terms of Horn's own act of placing, *Herðubreið at Home* and *Weather Reports You* resonate as much through their actual *making* – the collecting of information and the interactions that occur in this process – as they do through the final printed product. To enter into someone's home as in *Herðubreið at Home* is a privilege usually reserved for friends and family so to be invited in and allowed to photograph – to make the private public – suggests the building of a relationship of trust and perhaps for Horn, even one of making friends. To a degree this is speculative on my part, but I think that given Horn's ongoing commitment to Iceland it is hardly a stretch to imagine her interest in connecting to communities as well as geographies within the island. Indeed her 2009 *Vatnasfn/Library of Water* community centre seems to be testament to this imperative in her work. The old library in Stykkishólmur has been transformed by Horn, in collaboration with the Artangel group, into a space that houses several of her permanent artworks, but it also operates as a local community meeting place where chess tournaments and other social gatherings of community benefit take place.<sup>65</sup>

In a similarly related way *Weather Reports You* might actually be seen to reinforce a sense of community through the very participatory act of involving local people in the collection of the reports. By delegating to other resident islanders part of the responsibility for talking to locals and collecting their stories, Horn's project might easily confirm relationships between members of the same area or perhaps establish bonds with people from slightly further afield. Again this is a speculative reading, but one might imagine bonds being struck between interviewer and interviewee in the course of a shared conversation, or a broader sense of community bonding taking place through the shared experience of contributing to and subsequently reading the final publication.

In this case, the dynamic between interviewer and interviewee is not one of outsider/insider but one that recognises the way that communities grow organically

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<sup>65</sup> See, for example: Guðfríður Lilja Gretarsdóttir, 'The Chess Room: An Introduction/A Women's Place: Chess at Vatnasafn Library of Water', [http://www.libraryofwater.is/the\\_chess\\_room.html](http://www.libraryofwater.is/the_chess_room.html). Accessed 17 April 2010.

and can be defined according to many different constraints. Think, for example, of a possible situation where a man from Stykkishólmur is interviewed by someone who hails from Reykjavík. Two such individuals may share the common identity of being Icelanders, yet may have had very different life experiences, living respectively in village and city. Imagine also that the interviewer is female, this gender difference may prove to be a point of difference, but they may equally connect over a shared activity such as fishing. The point of this example is to suggest that the boundaries of identification are constantly shifting. The act (or acts) of producing *Weather Reports You* – that is its organisation and execution – reveals the way that place and community, as well as individual identity, can be constructed and reconstructed from different perspectives; it is a matter of how we place ourselves in relation to the world and others who occupy it.

In her introductory notes to *Weather Reports You*, Horn points out that the collection of reports was directed by word of mouth.<sup>66</sup> Upon visiting a location and recording the particular account, the interviewee then suggested other locals who might also be willing participants. In this way the project followed a relatively undetermined path from the outset, relying on the enthusiasm and goodwill of local residents to take the venture in new directions. For the interviewers this meant an organically evolving journey that rather than being guided by the geographical links between places, was the product of social connections where, in a sense, people and communities rather than roads and landmarks became the mapping devices. The interviewee was able to take an active role in setting the coordinates by which the project would evolve as opposed to simply fleshing out the spaces in a pre-planned venture.

Ingold has written that it is by means of paths that people move from place to place:

To reach a place, you need cross no boundary, but you must follow some kind of path. Thus there can be no places without paths, along which people arrive and depart; and no paths without places, that constitute their destinations and points of departure.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Horn, *Weather Reports You*, 10.

<sup>67</sup> Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*, 204.



These paths are the ‘taskscape made visible’.<sup>68</sup> However, Ingold’s reflection suggests a sense of direction, of setting out to get to a particular destination from the outset. Certainly this is probably true of most of our everyday journeys; going to work, visiting friends, a planned day trip. In Horn’s work, however, pathways are rarely so easily determined. In chapter two I wrote of the multiple pathways created by the viewer as they move around and between photographic images in the *Some Thames* and *Doubt by Water* installations. These are undetermined paths invented by the viewer that, like water, often follow a meandering course. This kind of indirect wandering tends to be the preserve of the tourist. It is a form of moving through space that that often means venturing into the unknown, for to wander in a place with which you are already familiar is to always know where your path will lead. Indeed, such a wandering progression suggests a process of coming to know, as Ingold proposes:

knowledge is grown along the myriad paths we take as we make our ways through the world in the course of everyday activities, rather than assembled from information obtained from numerous fixed locations.<sup>69</sup>

This knowledge comes not from visualising a cartographic representation of the earth’s surface – what Ingold calls a ‘view from nowhere’ – but from the experience of moving *within* the landscape.

### **The Local and The Global**

As much as *Herðubreið at Home* and *Weather Reports You* engage with the local they do not preclude the global within this discourse. Godfrey has claimed that ‘as an argument about being placed, [her] work stakes a position against the discourse of globalization’.<sup>70</sup> However, I think that this assertion is a slightly misguided one. Although, as Godfrey continues, Horn’s work can be seen in some ways as a ‘counter-argument to the discourse that celebrates the global flow and interchange of people and products, money and information’, this does not itself mean that Horn’s work is not sensitive to the different ways in which the forces of a globalised world do indeed

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Tim Ingold, ‘Footprints Through the Weather-world: Walking, Breathing, Knowing’, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol. 16, Issue Supplement s1, 2010, s121.

<sup>70</sup> Godfrey, 950.

impact on Icelandic life and landscape.<sup>71</sup> I argue that while Horn is certainly very outspoken about certain issues, such as the ecological impact of international business in Iceland, her work also recognizes the way that new technologies and global culture have become part of the very fabric of contemporary life in the country, not just forces that impinge on it from outside.

By virtue of Horn's paradoxical relationship to Icelandic culture (that of permanent tourist), her books are implicitly implicated in a transnational dialogue. Both publications form part of a conversation between aspects of Icelandic culture and the world beyond. In one sense, this 'beyond' is brought to Iceland in the form of Horn's American identity, which can be seen metaphorically to represent any kind of 'other' that is not native to the island's shores. Yet, within the images of *Herðubreið at Home* and the stories in *Weather Reports You* there are already clues to the shifting boundaries that blur notions of the local and the global. Rather than thinking of Iceland as a closed community with its own fixed identity, Horn's books picture the country as a place in which the local and the global are subtly coded and interleaved in the experience of place. In doing so, I think that these books refrain from idealising Iceland as a distant nation alone on the periphery of a globalising world or as a place simply at the mercy of the global zeitgeist. Having said this, it is important to point out that Horn's own writing's on Iceland's relation to the global community is often a paradoxical one as I shall go on to discuss in the following section.

*Herðubreið at Home* presents two very obvious examples of ways in which Iceland has been opened to the outside world: the presence of a laptop computer, and a television being watched by a young blonde-haired boy. Both of these technologies provide the means of communicating beyond Iceland's border, and indeed operate in many ways to erase, or at least re-map, territorial bounds. The streams of information that flow via the internet and other new media have opened the world to global transfers. Iceland's natural boundary, the North Atlantic Ocean, can now be easily traversed via another set of 'waves'.

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

This is similarly suggested by the television screen shots of American soap opera *Guiding Light* in *Pi* and *Arctic Circles*. Fríða Björk Ingvarsdóttir notes the significance of Horn's television screen shots in this work, writing that:

Horn suddenly introduces a completely different medium and at the same time another external reality; television. Television, which ever since its advent in the mid twentieth century, has been a representation of something remote; that which occurs in one place but is projected to another – even from great distance.<sup>72</sup>

What is especially poignant in this work is the way that the television images are juxtaposed with pictures that present an ostensibly more natural and 'earthy' view of Icelandic living. The photographs of sea and sky, egg-filled nests, rocks covered in birds, and piles of eider resting on an old wooden floor in the corner of an empty room suggest nothing of the trappings of twenty-first-century life. The picture one conjures, instead, is of clinging to 'old-fashioned' and 'traditional' ways; a life that is in-tune with nature. No doubt this is one possible way of life, but what is interesting about this work is the way that Horn teases the viewer with the suggestion of a naïve, idyllic existence that fulfils the desire for an exotic otherness. Certainly this might also be said about the reader's experience of *Weather Reports You*; what are ordinary encounters with the weather for Icelanders may seem strange and extreme to someone from elsewhere.

By interspersing these photographs of a supposedly more 'traditional' way of life with the television images, Horn introduces an element of time that locates the pictures not in some perpetual past of 'better times', but in the present; in an increasing globalised world where space is collapsed and where true remoteness is no longer really possible. Yet, I do not wish to take these claims of border crossing and globalisation too far for this would be to substitute one set of boundaries for another. On one hand the idea of a 'global village', to use Marshall McLuhan's term, offers the opportunity to remove distance so that new places and new cultures can be engaged.<sup>73</sup> However, globalization is also a phenomenon that threatens to quash diversity and become a homogenising force. Iceland's recent financial crisis is evidence of one way in which

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<sup>72</sup> Fríða Björk Ingvarsdóttir, 'Place Possesses You in its Absence' in Yngvason Hafþor and Fríða Björk Ingvarsdóttir (eds), *Roni Horn: My Oz* (Reykjavík: Listasafn Reykjavíkur, 2007), 12–13.

<sup>73</sup> See: Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *War and Peace in the Global Village* (Corte Madera, California: Ginko Press, 2001). Originally published 1968.

the global forces have proved detrimental to the security in this island nation. In 2008 Iceland's three major banks crashed after being unable to service international debts. This was in part a flow-on effect of the international financial crisis that has been especially felt in Europe. Economist James K. Jackson sums up the problematic relationship between global and local economic markets in this instance, writing that: 'the Icelandic case also raises questions about the cost and benefits of branch banking across national borders where banks can grow to be so large that disruptions in the financial market can cause defaults that outstrip the resources of national central banks to address.'<sup>74</sup>

In the light of this major political and economic downturn, Horn's Iceland works can be read differently. Although I have suggested that *Herðubreið at Home* and *Weather Reports You* do not simply present an idyllic picture of Iceland as somewhere that provides a more authentic way of living, looking back at these works post-crisis they do in some ways lend themselves to being thought of as images of 'better times'. However, I think it is important to be aware that Horn is acutely conscious of the competing interests of local and international bodies in Iceland's economic and natural environment and that these concerns already provided a critical backdrop to her work even before the global downturn. When asked, for example, in 2007 – the same year that these books were published – for her thoughts about recent changes in Iceland, Horn responded to one particular development by stating that:

[...] the main issue for me is the relationship to international business which is reflected in what has been done with the construction of the big dam in the interior, which will become a black spot, if it doesn't become something worse than a black spot, for the rest of Iceland's future. That is a whole new negative development in my opinion. I see nothing positive come out of it at all. It is mind-boggling that people are willing to compromise the land here for five hundred jobs. And it's not as if you have no other alternatives. This describes a profound lack of imagination.<sup>75</sup>

Even earlier than this Horn had voiced her concerns over Iceland's future in two

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<sup>74</sup> James K. Jackson, 'Iceland's Financial Crisis', CRS Report for Congress, 20 November 2008, [http://www.policyarchive.org/handle/10207/bitstreams/18921\\_Previous\\_Version\\_2008-11-20.pdf](http://www.policyarchive.org/handle/10207/bitstreams/18921_Previous_Version_2008-11-20.pdf). Accessed 5 December 2011.

<sup>75</sup> Jón Proppé, 'I Have Always Taken the Weather Personally: Róni Horn in an Interview About Her New Library of Water and Working in Iceland', *LIST Icelandic Art News*, No. 14, 2007, unpaginated. [http://www.artnews.is/issue014/014\\_rh.htm](http://www.artnews.is/issue014/014_rh.htm). Accessed 2 February 2008.

articles published in 1998 and 2002 respectively in Iceland's national newspaper *Morgunblaðið*.<sup>76</sup> In these texts she urged the Icelandic nation to resist industrial developments that would damage the natural environment and vented her frustrations at what she saw as the impending destruction of Iceland's ecological systems.

## The Reader

I want to end this chapter by considering how the reader of *Herðubreið at Home* and *Weather Reports You* is implicated in the experience of dwelling that I have discussed. So far my analysis of these projects has focused on the ways in which Horn's books engage with dwelling from the perspectives of those who live in Iceland and the artist's own process of placing herself in relation to the island. Both of these forms of inhabiting and making place have involved embodied performances of dwelling. Although I have gestured toward the importance of these books in terms of the way that they provoke certain perceptual response from the reader or viewer of the texts, I argue now that the reader's experience of these books is also an embodied one in which the performance of looking and reading allows a similarly embodied act of placing to be played out. As is true of all Horn's work, the viewer is integral to the way that her practice becomes meaningful. Meaning does not reside solely *within* her objects and images awaiting discovery by viewers but rather unfolds in connection to their participatory involvement with them. I argue that the same is true of both *Herðubreið at Home* and *Weather Reports You*. It is through the process of looking at and reading the material inside the book, as well as handling the physical object itself that these texts bring issues of perception, identity and belonging to the fore.

The book form offers an intimate viewing experience, one that parallels the private spheres of dwelling that Horn records in both *Herðubreið at Home* and *Weather Reports You*. One can imagine these small-scale paperbacks being read in the private spaces of the home or perhaps during a solo commute. Like the connection between photographer and subject, interviewer and interviewee, there is a one-on-one relationship between the reader, and the image or story rendered on each page. The

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<sup>76</sup> Roni Horn, 'The Nothing That Is', *Morgunblaðið*, 13 September 1998. Available at [http://www.libraryofwater.is/newspaper\\_01.html](http://www.libraryofwater.is/newspaper_01.html); Roni Horn, 'One Hundred Waterfalls, Five Hundred Jobs', *Morgunblaðið*, 27 July 2002. Available at [http://www.libraryofwater.is/newspaper\\_02.html](http://www.libraryofwater.is/newspaper_02.html).

book also elicits a certain tactile allure. Its very objectness necessitates a process of moving through the text; turning pages, feeling the texture of paper. *Weather Reports You* features a map of Iceland over two pages before the start of the individual reports. This cartographic representation of the Icelandic landmass becomes a reference point for the locations of the anecdotes that follow. Moving back and forth from story to map, trying to geographically locate each entry, the reader performs acts of placing. These publications present a significantly different reading experience to the *Still Water* book that I discussed in chapter two. The unwieldy large-format of *Still Water* presents a challenging and in some ways confrontational encounter in which the reader struggles against the size of the book. On the contrary, both *Weather Reports You* and *Herðubreið at Home* are smaller pocket-size texts that operate on a more intimate human scale.

The images and stories that fill *Herðubreið at Home* and *Weather Reports You* are, for most readers, intriguing insights into an unknown world, providing a glimpse into the lives of strangers, telling us something of their experience of home. But at the same time there is also a certain familiarity. The domestic interiors of *Herðubreið at Home* mirror those found in homes throughout much of the Weather too has a familiarity, simultaneously a universal phenomenon and a distinctly localised experience. As Horn notes in the introduction to *Weather Reports You*, ‘everyone has a story about the weather’. It is because of this familiarity that we, as readers, bring our own memories and experiences to these books. Horn’s supposedly objective images and the very personal weather reports she has recorded operate as conduits for the viewer’s subjective reflection. In doing so, *Herðubreið at Home* and *Weather Reports You* initiate a process by which we as readers re-affirm our own dwelt-in perspective, our own investment in place.

In this way, Horn undoes the polarisation of local and global, as it does the binaries of tourism and the everyday, insider and outsider. These books do not present scenic views of Iceland; they are not filled with the kind of imagery or stories that one usually collects as a tourist. Nor do they maintain the supposed rigorous objectivity of the anthropologist or ethnographer. Instead they function in a much more

performative way, becoming meaningful through the process of their production, and the process of their reception.

## Conclusion

In 2011 Roni Horn exhibited her most recent work at Hauser & Wirth gallery in London.<sup>1</sup> This new piece revisited the iconic work *You are the Weather*, updating it and adding another iteration to the series. For *You are the Weather, Part 2* (2010–2011) [fig. 5.1–5.3], Horn returned to Iceland to re-photograph Margrét Haraldsdóttir in the same hot pools that she had pictured her fifteen years earlier. Like the initial project, *You are the Weather, Part 2* consists of one hundred portrait photographs of Margrét as she bathes in the waters of different hot pools across Iceland. Again, each photograph captures Margrét's changing facial expressions, reflecting her mood and responses to the outdoor environment. Similarly too, the format of the installation is that of a horizon-like frieze that stretches around the four-walls of the gallery space, enveloping the viewer. Following precisely the same form, then, the primary feature of the installation becomes the time that has elapsed between the two series. Made visible on Margrét's face, the passage of years can be seen her slightly dropping features and her brow that is a little more furrowed. There is certainly a sense in which the young women pictured in 1995 has lost her naiveté; she is older and appears more self-assured, less vulnerable than her younger self.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Roni Horn: Recent Work', Hauser & Wirth, London, 9 September–23 October 2011. This exhibition included three new bodies of work: the photographic installation *You are the Weather, Part 2* (2010–11), an installation of cast glass sculptures called *Untitled* ("Once I saw Emily's comb, a very nasty-looking comb, too. She dropped it off the horsehair sofa the moment she died and it fell in the fire. Charlotte grabbed it, which seems an odd thing to have bothered about doing with her sister dying. There it is to this day, a bit burnt. One of the most horrible things I ever saw.") (2011), and a suite of drawings from the *If* (2011) series. *You are the Weather, Part 2* will also be published as Book X of the *To Place* series with the title *Haraldsdóttir, Part Two*.



As a discrete installation, this sequel functions in much the same way as *You are the Weather*, the most significant difference I think being the fact that the images of the older Margrét have lost some of the enigmatic allure and erotic intensity of the fresh-faced youth we were first introduced to. It is as a companion piece to *You are the Weather* that this second edition of the project becomes most interesting. As the title of the work suggests, *You are the Weather, Part 2* is intended to be read as an extension or another element of the original installation. As viewers, what we thought was a singular work, albeit composed of multiple images, now becomes only a part or a fragment of something else. The stable identity ascribed to the first incarnation of *You are the Weather*, one which has been maintained for fifteen years, has now been fractured so that the installation only exists relationally rather than as an autonomous work. Viewers are invited to experience both works comparatively; to consider the changes that have taken place in the passage of time between the first and second parts. This comparative gesture opens up another in-between space that the viewer must navigate, if not physically then as an act of memory. I discussed this strategy in chapter one, arguing that Horn's use of doubling and repetition created an in-between space in which the viewer performs the indeterminacy of androgynous identity.

Horn's practice is rife with these kinds of operations where one work often morphs into another or is reconceived in a different format. The array of different works made from her Thames photographs or the reformulation of installations into books (or vice versa) speak to this tendency to reinvent her works in ways that challenge the perception of viewers, and perhaps even herself. Indeed this is also true of the artist's approach to exhibitions where she enjoys juxtaposing works, old and more recent, in ways that might evoke new meanings. The effect of this flexible refiguring of works is to engender a constant reframing of experience. The more one delves into Horn's works, the more they begin to unravel and reconnect with other pieces in interesting and sometimes unexpected ways. I said in the introduction to this thesis that the pattern of interlaced lines found on a piece of wallpaper in one of Horn's *Pi* photographs can in some ways be seen as a metaphor for the interconnected nature of the artist's work.

Inasmuch as Horn advocates the presence of a viewer or participant to performatively activate her work, I think that she herself performatively engages with ideas of identity and perception in her very approach to the making of art.

Roni Horn's work has been recognised by a number of writers as a practice primarily engaged in an examination of identity. So too, landscape has been an often discussed facet of her practice. Examinations of these aspects of the artist's oeuvre, however, have, I think, neglected to really unpack how it is that Horn's work operates. These readings have generally taken the form of catalogue surveys in which the key terms at stake have been taken for granted rather than undergoing serious analysis, and indeed, as I pointed out in my introduction, many of these texts have been ones endorsed by the artist herself. The aim of this thesis has therefore been to perform a close reading of key works in Horn's practice in relation to the notions of identity and landscape in order to tease out how these concerns become meaningful within Horn's broader methodological approach. It is in this regard that I have sought to underscore the importance of performativity in Horn's work.

Where this thesis finds its critical import is in examining *how* it is that Horn's works explore identity. The 'acts' that her works engender are responses to, not representations of, the processes of identity formation. It is my view that the performative nature of her work places it as a kind of tool that facilitates the staging of perception and thus the critical questioning of identity: how it is produced, according to whose point of view, and how it might be reformulated. In an early catalogue to a group sculpture exhibition Horn describes 'form' as a 'tool, a vehicle for perception rather than an end in itself.'<sup>2</sup> Certainly I think that this holds true of Horn's more recent works, especially the photographic installations that have been my primary object of study in this thesis. As I have argued, it is through the particular placement of images within a spatial installation context that Horn's photographs become meaningful 'forms' that stimulate performative experiences in the oscillation between the embodiment of the viewer and the visibility of the image. Understood as tools, then, the form of these installations does not simply present the problem of

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<sup>2</sup> Kathy Halbreich, Katy Kline and Susan Sidlauskas. *The Material Object: Sculptures by Tom Bills, Roni Horn, John Gibbons, Nicholas Pearson* (Cambridge, Mass: Hayden Gallery Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1980), unpaginated. The exhibition ran from 11 October – 16 November 1980.

identity (either in a general sense or of specific identities), nor do they suppose to present a solution to problems of identification. As a tool, Horn's work falls somewhere between these two endeavours; a tool is something to aid in the renovation or solving of an issue but it is not the fixing itself. Similarly we might say that the tool is meaningful in the space between deconstruction and reconstruction. This sense of in-between-ness that pervades Horn's practice, and which I have suggested governs her very approach to art-making, stems from the artist's own sense of androgynous identity.

In the first chapter of this thesis, I set the foundations for thinking of Horn's work in terms of an androgynous perspective. Androgyny, for Horn, is not a sexual designation. It is not conceived of as a joining of male and female characteristics but rather is a concept that lends itself to thinking of identity outside of the binary oppositions that so often dominate Western thought. Experienced by Horn as a sense of being neither one thing nor another, androgyny suggests an in-between space that is not restricted by pre-determined categories of identity but instead allows for the possibility of difference. These performed encounters, I have argued, are played out as bodily experiences that mirror Judith Butler's 'acts of repetition'. The performative activity that Horn initiates through the placement of her works, engages the viewer in an embodied encounter in which I have argued they physically play out the kinds of repetitive gestures of gender constructions. On Horn's part, this is a manoeuvre that presents viewers of her work with the problem of how identity in more general terms is constructed. Using strategies of doubling and repetition whereby viewers move between multiple objects or images, her work is particularly incisive in its ability to refocus the experience of the viewer in ways that present a challenge to engrained perceiving and behaving in the world. By engaging with issues such as identity construction from such an oblique perspective, one that allows the viewer's to within the context of an art practice, I think that Horn's work has the potential for effecting a more fundamental shift in thinking (and in being).

It is through acknowledgment of her own sense of androgynous identity, of being neither male nor female, that Horn's work is opened to perceiving other forms of difference. Androgyny, like other non-normative gender identities, is perceived as a kind of excess from the perspective of the heterosexual binary. I have argued that

works such as *Still Water (The River Thames, for Example)* (1999) and *Pooling-You* (1996–1997), evoke an experience of excess in their representations of watery surfaces, an excess that I think speaks to the perceived excess of androgynous identity. In these works, like those that I discussed in the following chapters, aspects of landscape become an important trope by which Horn engages the issues of identity and sexual difference outlined in chapter one. As a phenomenon that I have argued is, at least in part, constructed through the human imagination, landscape can also be considered a ‘thing’ in process rather than a fixed ‘world out there’ that we exist independently to. The entwined nature of our relationship to the natural environment involves a reciprocity in which the identities of landscape and humans are made and remade through each other. Certainly this dynamic is one that Horn has spoken of often, particularly in relation to Iceland.

In *Still Water (The River Thames, for Example)* and *Pooling-You*, landscape takes the form of bodies of water. I have framed these works within discourses of the sublime where I think there are resonances in terms not only of the overwhelming expanses or tumultuous tracts of moving water, but also in relation to the experience of androgyny. While I have suggested that the experience of viewing these works as series of singular images is one that relates to the encounter of overwhelming or threatening forces that is associated with the Romantic sublime – particularly in the work of Immanuel Kant and Edmund Burke – I think that her photographic images become more radical when considered in terms of the embodied experiences they orchestrate in relation to the space of their display. I have drawn on the work of Barbara Claire-Freeman in positioning these installations as exerting an experience of the feminine sublime. This is a reconceptualization of the sublime that sees excess as an opportunity for difference.

The idea that these works lead the viewer through experiences in which excess can be imaginatively reconceived as a positive encounter with the possibility difference, opens the way to consider the operations of perception in a more specific way. The installation *You are the Weather* and *Pi* that I introduced in chapter three employ the form of the horizon – a device usually associated as a structure of the landscape. Working with Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s theory of perceptual horizons, I have argued that these installations fundamentally reposition the viewer in relation to the artwork,

placing them within the very object of their gaze. This is a complication of viewer and view that Merleau-Ponty argues embeds us more firmly in the world and whereby our identity is produced in the process of a reciprocal exchange.

The issues of identity, difference and perception that I developed in the first three chapters of this thesis coalesce around the two book projects that I examined in my final chapter. These publications, as I noted, take a rather different approach to addressing themes that have been the focus of this thesis but I think that in many ways this transition not only exemplifies the diversity of Horn's practice, it also provides an opportunity to engage with Horn's concerns in a more 'real world' context outside of the gallery space. *Herðubreið at Home* (2007) and *Weather Reports You* (2007) take the form of ostensibly documentary projects that record the experiences of Icelandic locals through images of their dwellings and stories of their experiences of weather. What is particularly interesting to me in the context of this thesis is the way that these publications present a layering of multiple perspectives in relation to place, which ultimately can be read as an assertion of the multiplicity and contingent nature of identities.

Ingold's notion of the 'dwelling perspective' provides a useful means of understanding the way that these different identities are made, particularly as they are shaped in relation to place. The multiple images and stories that relate something of the experience of life in Iceland demonstrate the shaping of place and of belonging through the everyday practices of making home, carrying out work tasks and experiencing weather. However, I have also argued that both *Herðubreið at Home* and *Weather Reports You* function as acts of Horn's own placing in Iceland. Referring to herself as a 'permanent tourist', her relation to Iceland is a complex one in which she is neither local nor outsider. Instead, she again occupies a more liminal, in-between position. Her pseudo-anthropological approach is one that has allowed her to navigate Iceland by building an intimate relationship with its people and thus developing a connection that exceeds the transitory and often superficial experience of the tourist. The experience of the viewer's or readers of these works provides a final layer of perspectives. Like her sculptures and installations, Horn's books also involve an embodied encounter. I see these projects as becoming meaningful for the reader not

simply in enabling a voyeuristic glimpse of another way of life, but more importantly by embedding them more firmly in their own phenomenal world through the process of looking, reading and moving through the books.

Horn's work is clearly politically motivated, both in terms of her engagement with identity and her concern with ecological issues (a topic that I have only very briefly addressed in this thesis). However, I think that one of the successes of the work, and indeed one of the things that makes her practice so consistently compelling, is the manner in which she approaches these themes. Her work is by no means a didactic or preaching plea for change or to 'see things my way'. In this sense, I do not think that her work is motivated toward a highly specific transformative agenda. Instead her practice works subtly to prompt questions about the way that we construct and perceive the world. In this regard it suggests new ways of looking at and experiencing the world in all its variety.

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